半蔵の門 PATH OF THE ASSASSIN

VOLUME 8

SHINOBI WITH EXTENDING FISTS

By KAZUO KOIKE & GOSEKI KOJIMA

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Lifelong Friends, with the Same Dreams,
Striving to Grow into a Rising River.

DARK HORSE MANGA™

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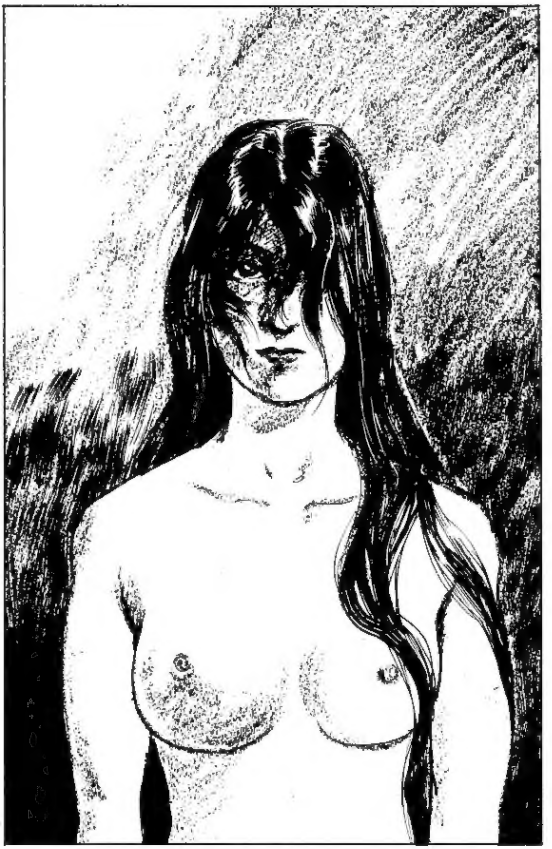
Chapter On
Esha Jōzi

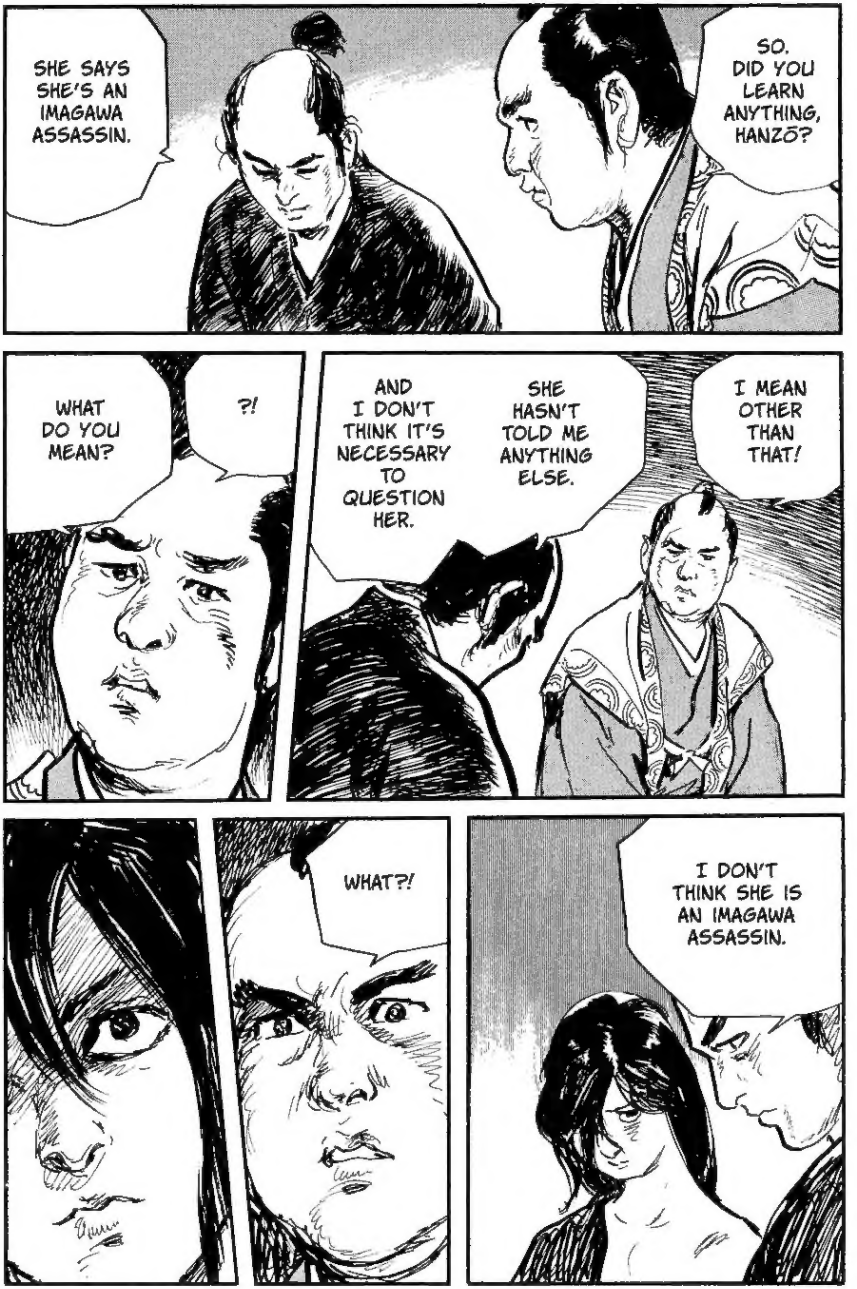
No. 1: Shinobi With Extending Fists (Part 2)



I LIKE ABLE MEN.
I KNEW YOU WERE GOOD, HANZŌ.

AND I LIKE KIND-HEARTED MEN EVEN MORE.
ARE YOU GOING TO KILL ME, HANZŌ?
I LOST. YOU CAN DO ME BEFORE YOU KILL ME.

A FEMALE SHINOBI IS A NOVELTY, YOU KNOW.
HM. YOU LOOK QUITE RESENTFUL.


SHE SAYS SHE'S AN IMAGAWA ASSASSIN.
SO. DID YOU LEARN ANYTHING, HANZŌ?
WHAT DO YOU MEAN?
?!
AND I DON'T THINK IT'S NECESSARY TO QUESTION HER.
SHE HASN'T TOLD ME ANYTHING ELSE.
I MEAN OTHER THAN THAT!
WHAT?!
I DON'T THINK SHE IS AN IMAGAWA ASSASSIN.

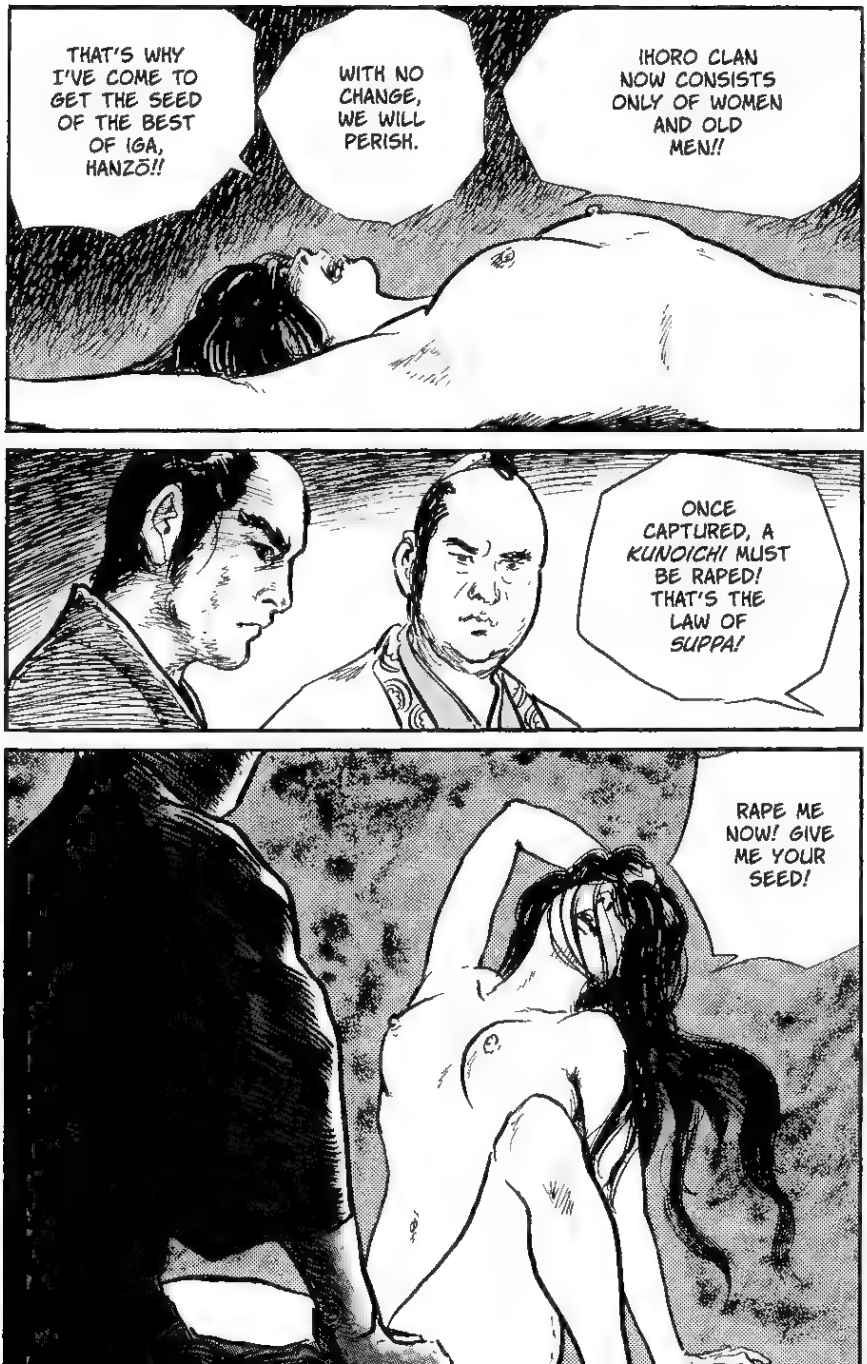
WHO SENT HER, THEN?
?!
?!
?!
SHE'S PROBABLY NOT AN ASSASSIN.
IF YOU HAD NOT APPROACHED TO LOOK, SHE COULD NOT HAVE ACCOMPLISHED HER MISSION.
THIS IS NOT AT ALL WHAT I WOULD EXPECT FROM AN ASSASSIN.
SHE TOOK THE TROUBLE TO BRING HYDRANGEA, REPLACED THOSE THAT HAD YET TO BLOOM AND HID NEARBY, WAITING FOR YOU, MILORD.

WHAT IF YOU DIDN'T COME OVER THAT MORNING...
IF THE DRY WEATHER CONTINUED, THE HYDRANGEA WOULD'VE WITHERED. NO ASSASSIN WOULD RELY ON SOMETHING AS UNCERTAIN AS THAT.
...AND INSTEAD, DID SO THE FOLLOWING MORNING, OR THE DAY AFTER?
I'LL HAVE TO ADMIT A LACK OF COMPETENCY ON THIS, BUT...IF SHE IS CAPABLE OF ENTERING THE GARDEN WITHOUT SHOWING ANY SIGN OF HER PRESENCE, SHE COULD'VE FOOLED ME AND CAME STRAIGHT UP BEHIND YOU.
HMM. I SEE YOUR POINT.

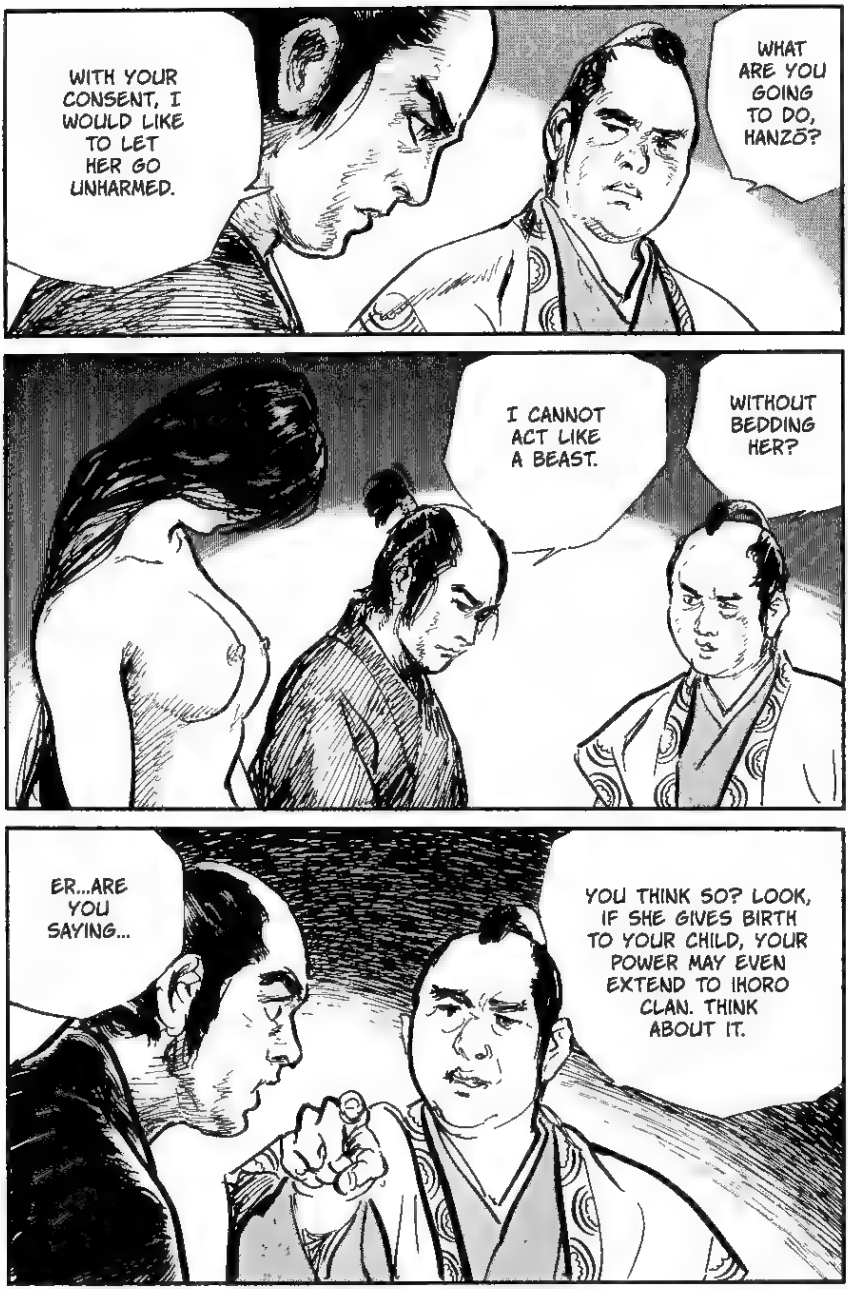
WHY DID SHE?
BESIDES, IF SHE THREW HER *KUNAI* AT YOU, MILORD, AS YOU CAME NEAR, SHE COULD'VE EASILY FINISHED THE JOB. INSTEAD, SHE CHOSE TO SHOOT HER FINGERS UP OUT OF THE FLOWER. THAT'S AN ELABORATE MOVE.
I THINK...
I DON'T UNDER-STAND.
...SHE WANTED US TO BELIEVE SHE'S AN ASSASSIN, AND WANTED TO BE CAUGHT ON PURPOSE.

BUT...FROM THE WAY SHE'S REACTING, I SAY YOU'RE RIGHT.
YOU MEAN THOSE WHO ARE ALSO CALLED THE WIND OF KAMAKURA?
HAVE YOU HEARD OF SUPPA CALLED FŪMA, MILORD?
THE USE OF FISTS AND FINGERS IS A FAVORITE IHORO TECHNIQUE.
SHE ANNOUNCED HERSELF AS KIKKŌ OF IHORO. I BELIEVE SHE DIDN'T LIE ABOUT THAT.
FROM WHAT I HEAR, THEY ARE BASED IN IZUMO, BUT BECAUSE NO BOYS HAVE BEEN BORN FOR A WHILE, THEIR NUMBER OF YOUNG AND STRONG SHINOBI ARE DECREASING EVERY YEAR.
YES. IHORO IS A CLAN OF FŪMA.

THAT'S ABSOLUTELY RIGHT!

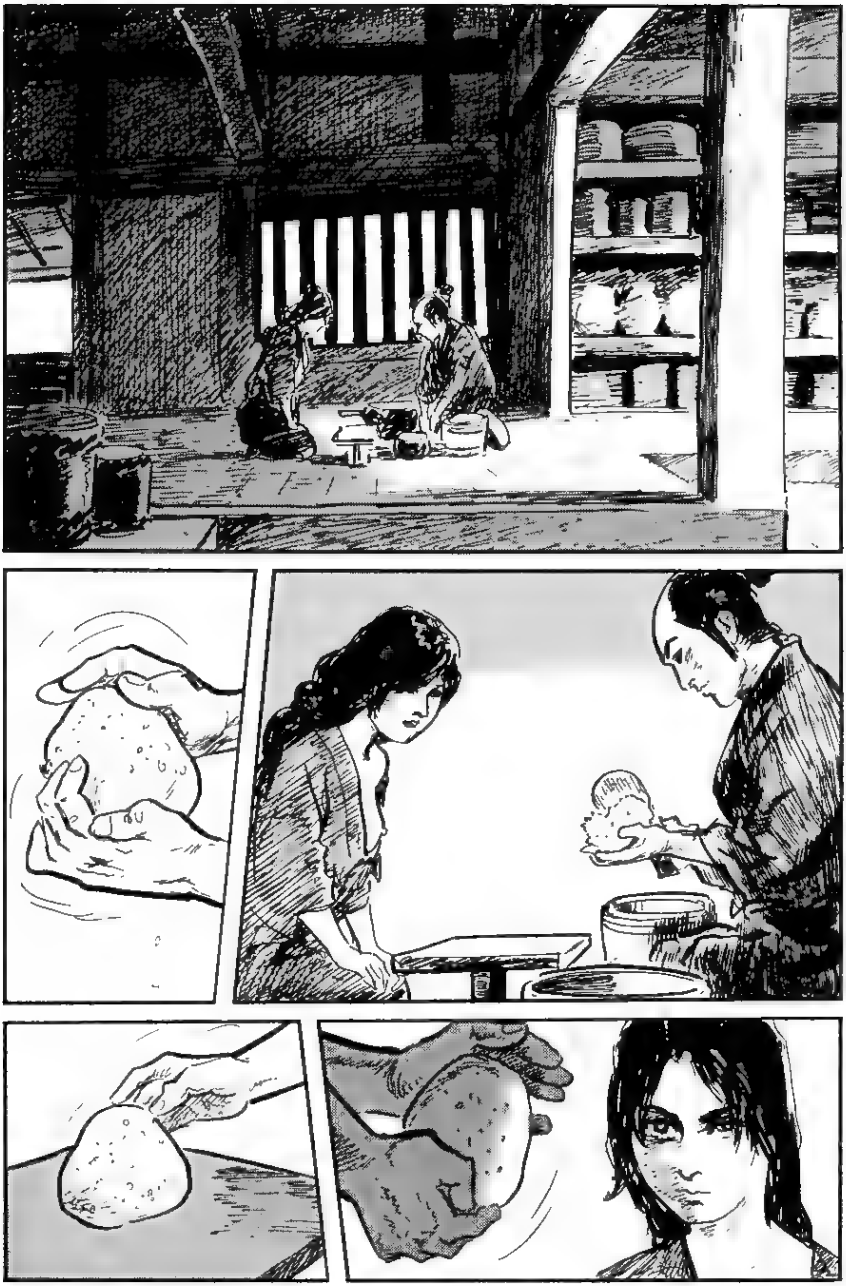

THAT'S WHY I'VE COME TO GET THE SEED OF THE BEST OF IGA, HANZŌ!!
WITH NO CHANGE, WE WILL PERISH.
IHORO CLAN NOW CONSISTS ONLY OF WOMEN AND OLD MEN!!
ONCE CAPTURED, A KUNOICHI MUST BE RAPED! THAT'S THE LAW OF SUPPA!
RAPE ME NOW! GIVE ME YOUR SEED!

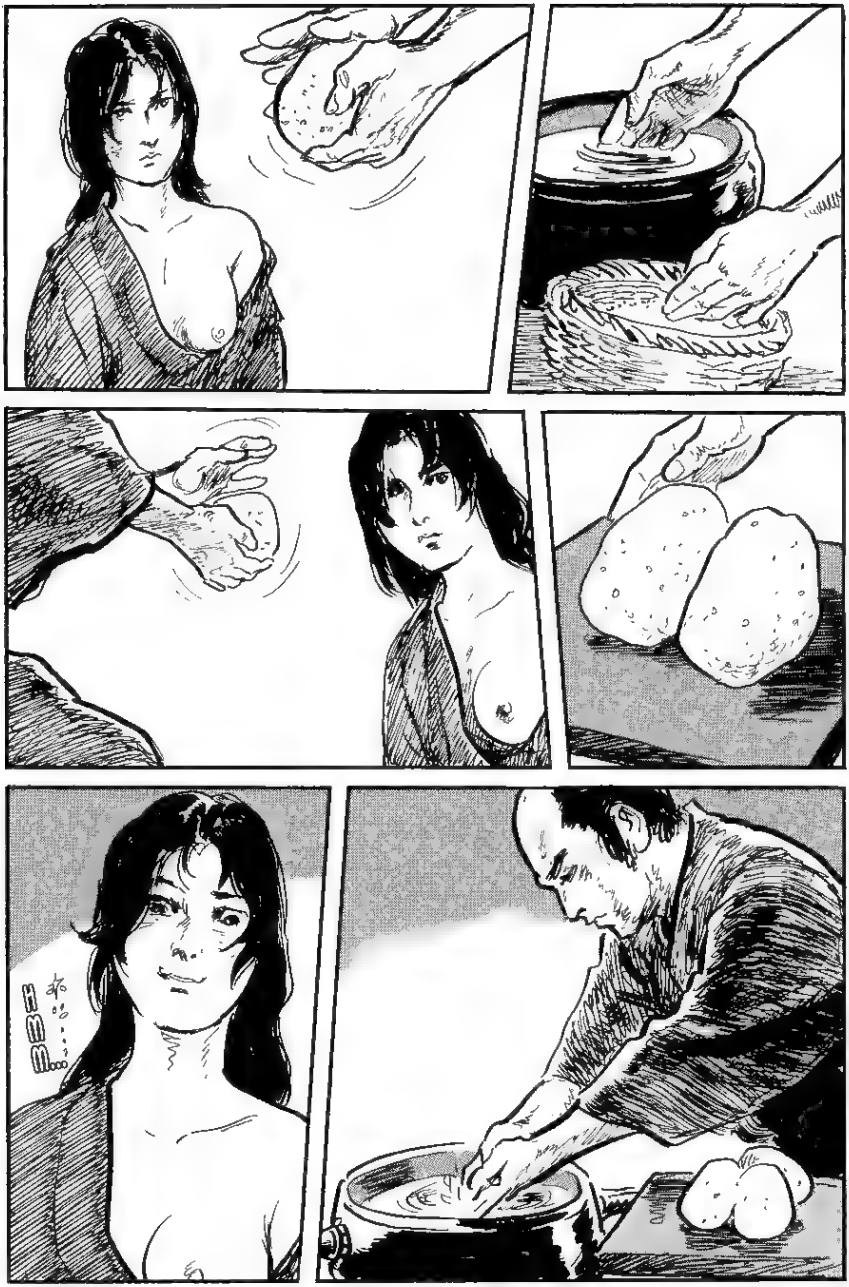
I'VE GOT THE SKILL TO ESCAPE. EVEN IF I'M CAPTURED, I CAN GET AWAY. THAT'S WHY I'VE COME TO BE ASSAULTED!
THAT'S WHY YOU HIDE YOUR FACE WITH YOUR HAIR AND TRY NOT TO SHOW YOUR TEARS.
HOW SAD. YOU MAY BE A *KUNOICHI*, BUT STILL, IT MUST BE PAINFUL.


WITH YOUR CONSENT, I WOULD LIKE TO LET HER GO UNHARMED.
WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO, HANZŌ?
I CANNOT ACT LIKE A BEAST.
WITHOUT BEDDING HER?
ER...ARE YOU SAYING...
YOU THINK SO? LOOK, IF SHE GIVES BIRTH TO YOUR CHILD, YOUR POWER MAY EVEN EXTEND TO IHORO CLAN. THINK ABOUT IT.

WILL YOU GIVE YOURS THEN?
WHA... WHAT'RE YOU SAYING?!
SHALL I GIVE HER MY SEED?
BESIDES... HER SKILLS ARE EXCELLENT FOR A WOMAN. REMEMBER, THEY SAY ICHIGO ICHIE. I WON'T MENTION THIS TO TSUKUMO.
TO BE CHOSEN LIKE THAT, YOU ARE A FORTUNATE MAN.
SHE CAME WANTING THE BEST OF IGA, HANZŌ.
MEN MUST BE KIND.

(6)
THE HEAD OF MY CLAN TOLD ME TO GET THE SEED OF TŌMA ENŌ.
...TOUCHED ME.
NO MAN HAS EVER...
I'VE MET YOU ONCE BEFORE...
BUT I DIDN'T WANT HIS! I TOLD HIM I MUST HAVE HANZŌ'S, BECAUSE YOU'RE THE BEST OF IGA.

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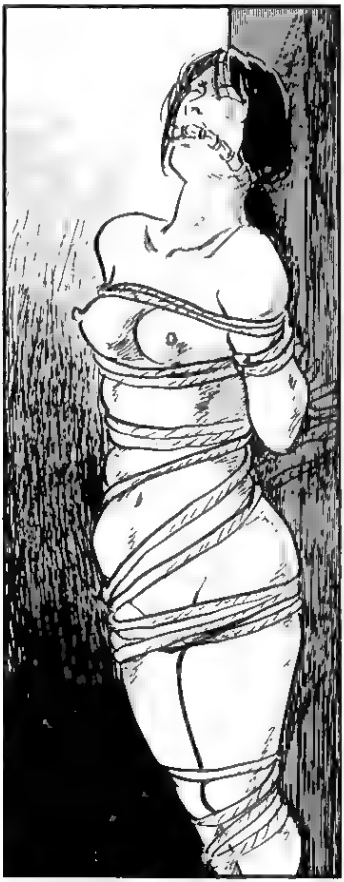
YOU'LL SLEEP WITH ME THEN.
I'M GLAD.
BECAUSE IT MEANT YOU'D WANT ME TO TAKE THEM TO EAT ON MY WAY HOME. BUT IF IT WAS THREE OR LESS, IT MEANS YOU WANT ME TO EAT THEM HERE AND NOW.
I WAS THINKING, IF YOU MADE FOUR OR MORE, YOU'D TELL ME TO GO AWAY.
EAT.
AND THAT MEANS YOU WILL MAKE LOVE TO ME.

YES?
I HAVE TWO QUESTIONS.
SO LONG AS I LET YOU KNOW I WAS A WOMAN, I WAS SURE YOU WOULDN'T KILL, BUT INSTEAD YOU'D CAPTURE AND RAPE ME.
I DID.
DID YOU THINK I'D RAPE YOU WITHOUT QUESTION?

MY MOTHER WAS RAPED FOR TWELVE DAYS AFTER SHE WAS CAPTURED, AND THEN KILLED.
IT'S *SUPPA'S* LAW TO RAPE *KUNOICHI* AND MURDER AFTERWARDS.
BUT WHY? DO I LOOK LIKE THAT MUCH OF A DOG?
I'VE BEEN WORKING ON THAT TECHNIQUE FOR MORE THAN A DECADE.
YOU SAID YOU ARE CONFIDENT THAT YOU CAN ESCAPE EVEN IF YOU ARE LOCKED UP.
I AM *SAMURAI*, NOT *SUPPA*. I HAVE A CERTAIN PRIDE. EVEN IF YOU WANT MY SEED, I CAN'T JUST GIVE IT TO YOU.
THEN TRY GETTING AWAY. IF YOU SUCCEED, I WILL SLEEP WITH YOU.

IF HAVING SEX WITH YOU WOULD CLEAR SUCH BLAME, I WILL DO THAT.
BUT IF I LET A PRISONER ESCAPE, I MUST TAKE THE BLAME FOR IT.
...YOU WILL SLEEP WITH ME OVER AND OVER, FOR I WILL SNEAK IN AGAIN, AS MANY TIMES AS IT TAKES.
IF I CAN'T CONCEIVE THIS TIME...
BUT PROMISE ME.
I'LL DEFINITELY GET AWAY.
HOW YOU BARGAIN! HA HA HA HA.
HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA.



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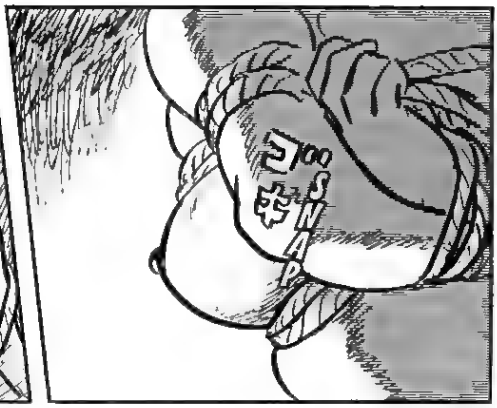
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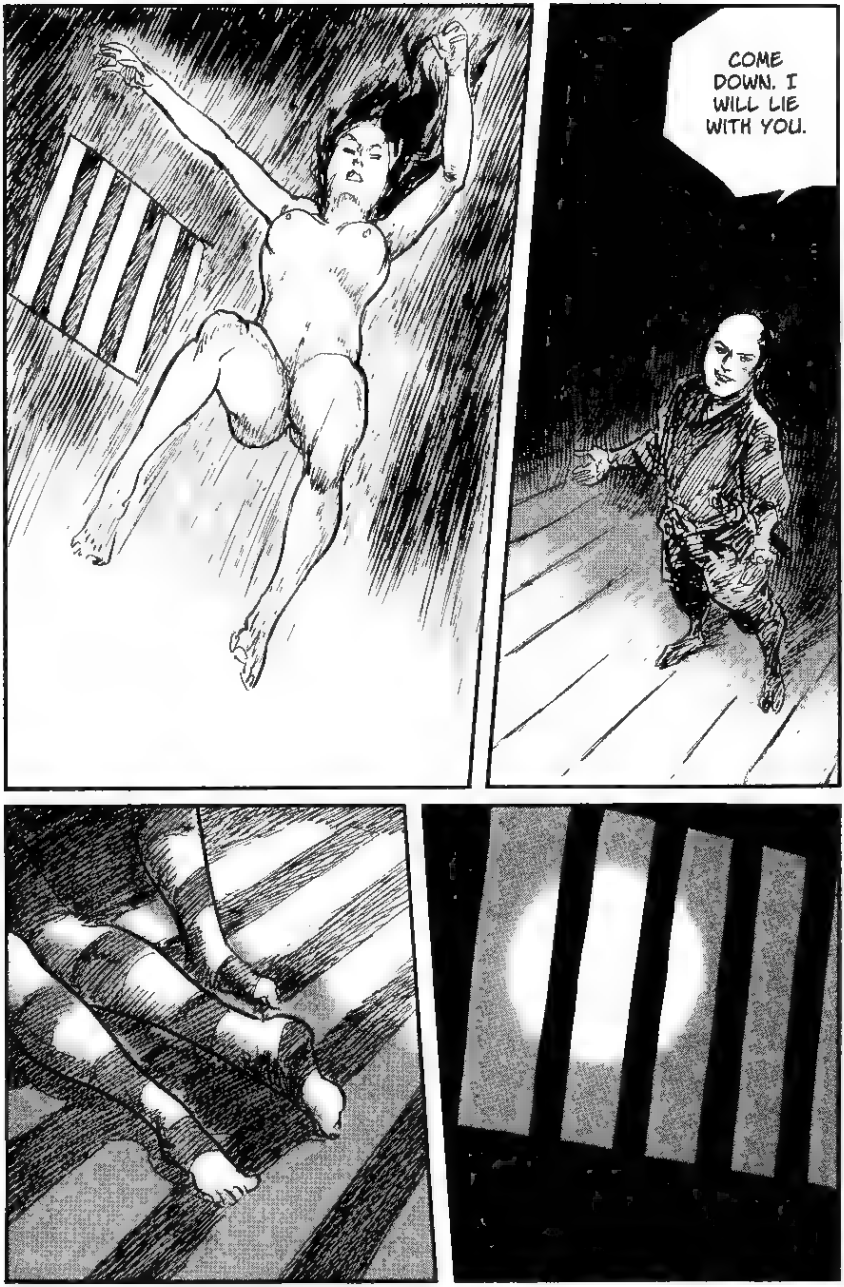
SNAP

SNAP
SNAP
KRAK
KRAK
POP
POP

EXCELLENT! YOU DISJOINTED WELL! BUT NOW, HOW WOULD YOU GET AWAY?
WHAT?
I WOULDN'T.

AND I'D SHOW THE WAY MYSELF.
I WOULD OFFER A HIDDEN PATH THAT LEADS INTO THE CASTLE ON INABAYAMA IN EXCHANGE.
YOU'D BE ABLE TO DO ODA A FAVOR.
BUT HANZŌ, YOU WOULD BELIEVE ME, AND I'D BECOME YOUR GUIDE--AND THEN I'D FIND MY CHANCE TO ESCAPE.
THERE IS A SECRET APPROACH TO THAT RENOWNED FORTRESS?
OF COURSE NOT.


COME DOWN. I WILL LIE WITH YOU.

YES.
BEAR IT.

SO IT DOES EXIST THEN!
I'LL TELL YOU...WHERE TO FIND THE HIDDEN PATH INTO INABAYAMA CASTLE!
I WANT TO...STAY WITH YOU.
I DON'T WANT TO... GO BACK.
HANZŌ, YOU ARE THE KIND OF MAN WHO DISLIKES TO BARGAIN. THAT'S WHY I MEANT TO KEEP IT AS A LIE UNTIL AFTER WE HAD SEX. IF YOU'LL LET ME SNEAK BACK ANYTIME...
...I WILL TELL.
SEE. I KNEW IT.
I DON'T USE *KUNOICHI* FOR SUCH THINGS.

DON'T MENTION IT AGAIN?
DON'T MENTION THAT AGAIN.
WOMEN ARE NOT TOOLS. BESIDES, I'M NOT ODA'S VASSAL.
ANYTIME.
YOU MEAN, I CAN COME BACK...
SHA-

Chapter On
Esha Jōzi

No. 2: Tiger Eyes And A Cow's Pace

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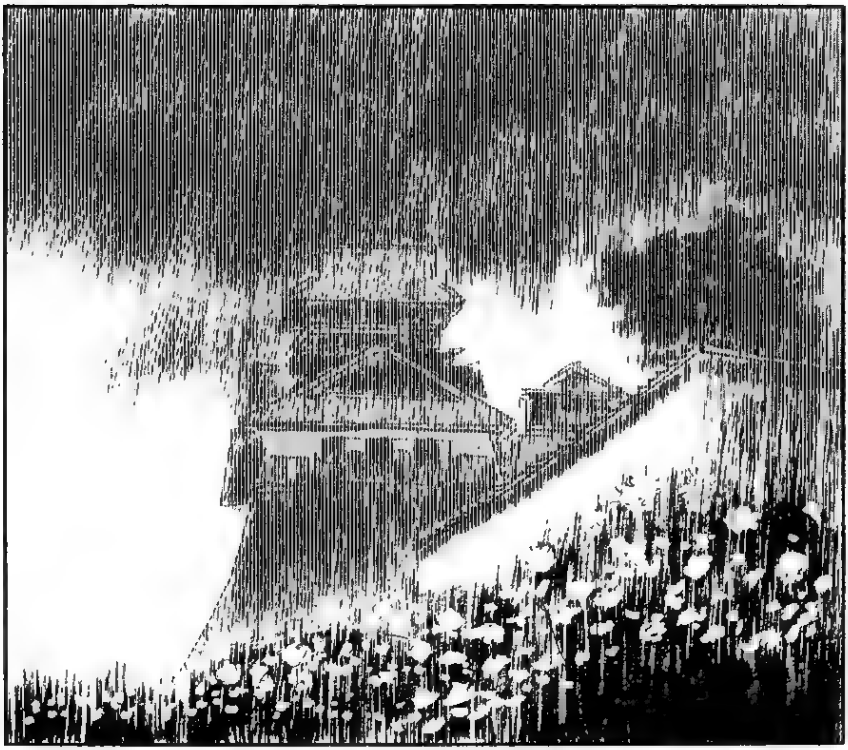
YAAAOU
YASHOI
IN SEPTEMBER OF THE NINTH YEAR OF EIROKU (1566 A.D.), A MESSENGER FROM HIDEYOSHI IN KIYOSU RUSHED TO SEE HANZŌ.
THE NAME OF THE MESSENGER WAS HACHISUKA KOROKU.

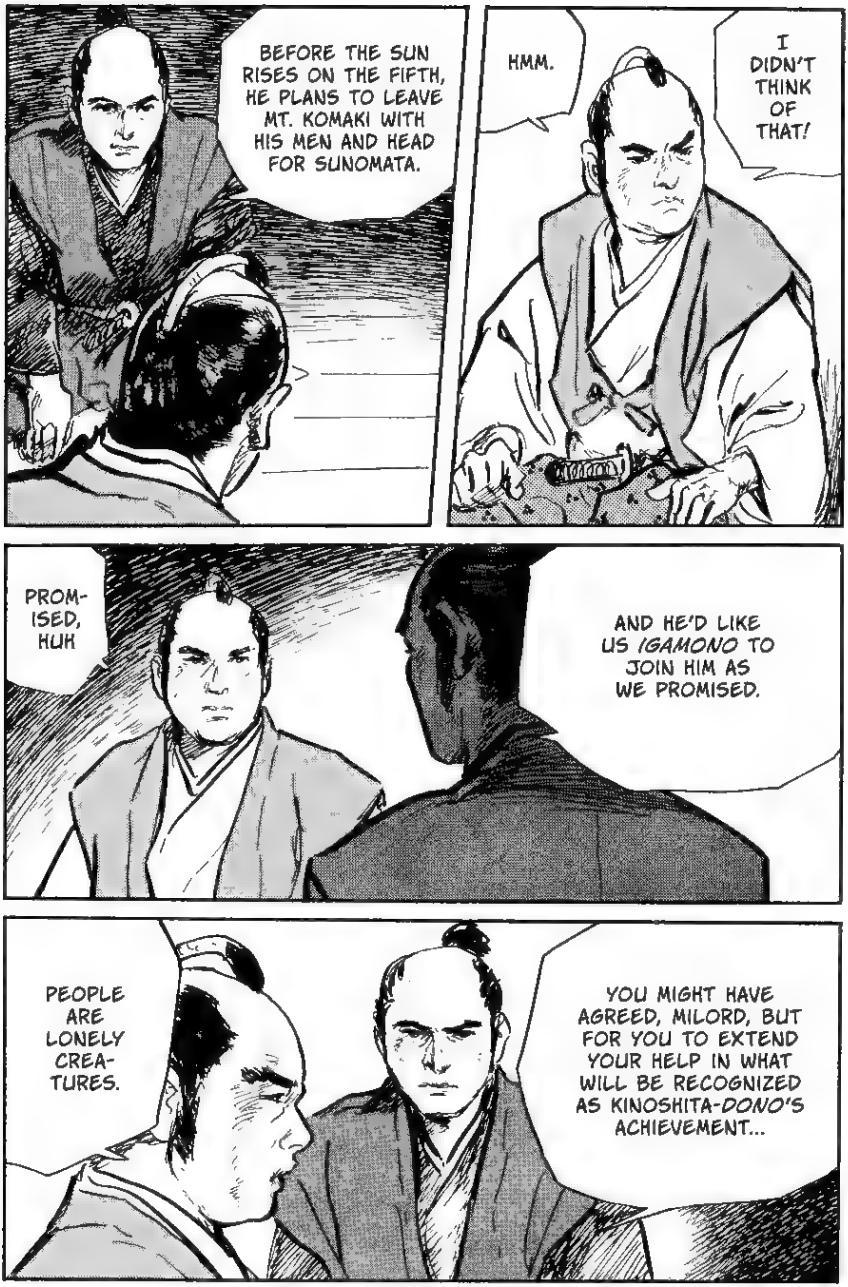
NO RIDER?!
TRUM
TRUM
TRUM
TRUM
TRUM

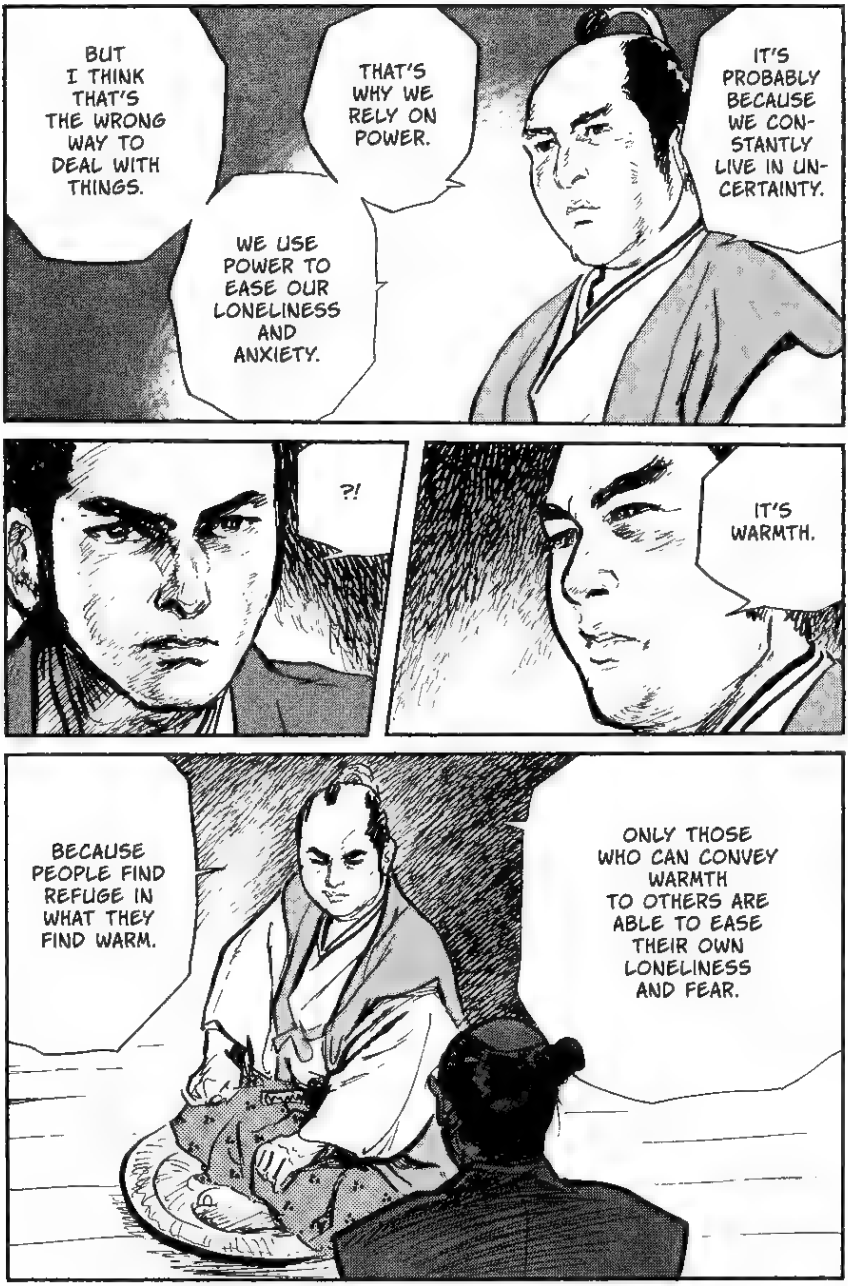
I'M A MESSENGER FROM ODA!
I AM HACHISUKA KOROKU, A VASSAL OF KINOSHITA-*SAMA*! PARDON ME FOR NOT DISMOUNTING! HIYAAH!



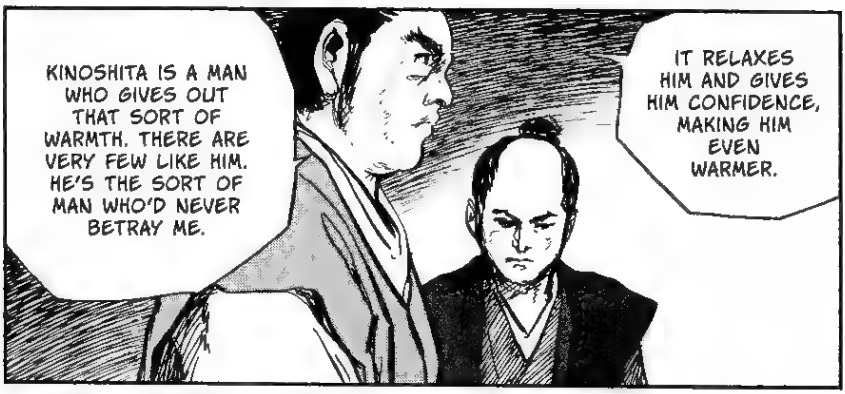
NO. I'M AWAKE.
ARE YOU ASLEEP, SIR?
YES.
ABOUT SUNOMATA?
I RECEIVED A MESSAGE FROM KINOSHITA-SAMA.

THEY SAY THE TRUTH COMES OUT THE THIRD TIME AROUND.
AT LONG LAST, HE SAYS, THEY'RE GOING TO BUILD A FORT ON SUNOMATA AS A FOOTHOLD FOR INVADING INABAYAMA.
THE WALL IS TO BE TWO-THOUSAND KEN.
TEN ROW HOUSES, BOTH SMALL AND BIG, AND TEN TOWERS.
WHO KNOWS IF IT COULD BE SUCCESS-FUL THIS TIME.
TWO GENERALS OF ODA HAVE FAILED SO FAR.
FIFTY THOUSAND FENCE POSTS AND OTHER MATERIALS HAVE ALREADY BEEN PROCURED. ONCE THE POSTS ARE DELIVERED TO THE UPPER STREAM OF THE KISO RIVER, WE ARE TO BUILD RAFTS AND SEND THEM ON DOWN.


BEFORE THE SUN RISES ON THE FIFTH, HE PLANS TO LEAVE MT. KOMAKI WITH HIS MEN AND HEAD FOR SUNOMATA.
HMM.
I DIDN'T THINK OF THAT!
PROM-ISED, HUH
AND HE'D LIKE US *IGAMONO* TO JOIN HIM AS WE PROMISED.
PEOPLE ARE LONELY CREA-TURES.
YOU MIGHT HAVE AGREED, MILORD, BUT FOR YOU TO EXTEND YOUR HELP IN WHAT WILL BE RECOGNIZED AS KINOSHITA-*DONO*'S ACHIEVEMENT...

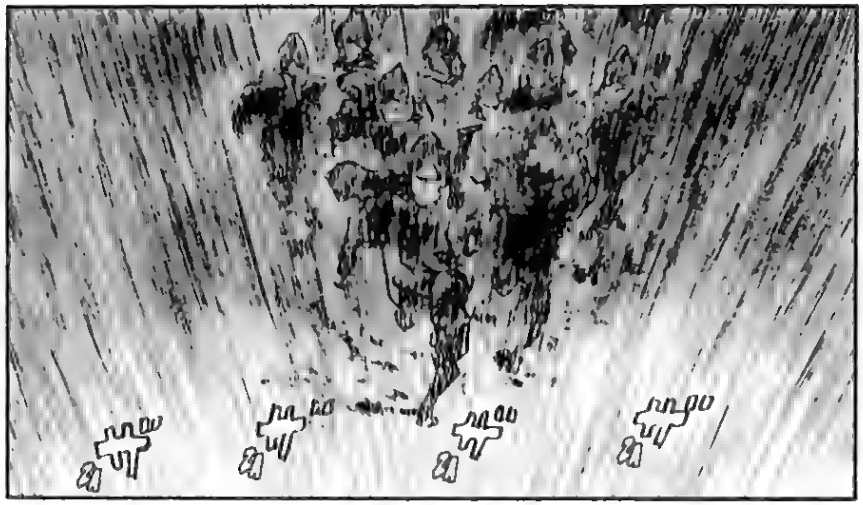

IT'S PROBABLY BECAUSE WE CONSTANTLY LIVE IN UNCERTAINTY.
THAT'S WHY WE RELY ON POWER.
WE USE POWER TO EASE OUR LONELINESS AND ANXIETY.
BUT I THINK THAT'S THE WRONG WAY TO DEAL WITH THINGS.
?!
IT'S WARMTH.
ONLY THOSE WHO CAN CONVEY WARMTH TO OTHERS ARE ABLE TO EASE THEIR OWN LONELINESS AND FEAR.
BECAUSE PEOPLE FIND REFUGE IN WHAT THEY FIND WARM.

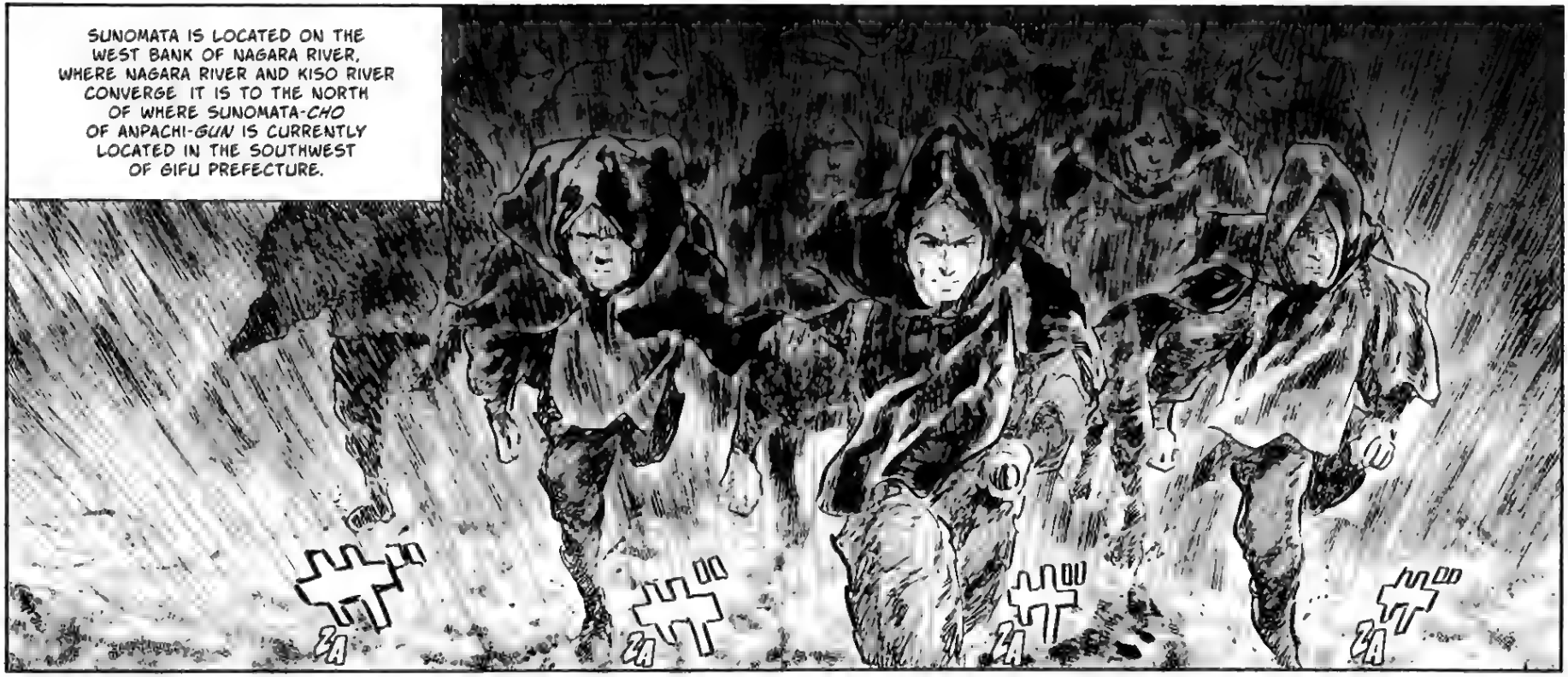
WHEN THEY DO, IT'S POWERFUL.
PEOPLE GATHER AROUND A MAN WITH WARMTH.


KINOSHITA IS A MAN WHO GIVES OUT THAT SORT OF WARMTH. THERE ARE VERY FEW LIKE HIM. HE'S THE SORT OF MAN WHO'D NEVER BETRAY ME.
IT RELAXES HIM AND GIVES HIM CONFIDENCE, MAKING HIM EVEN WARMER.

UNDER-STOOD.

I'D BETTER KEEP MY PROMISE.
IF KINOSHITA THINKS I'M ALSO THE KIND OF MAN WHO HAS THAT WARMTH...



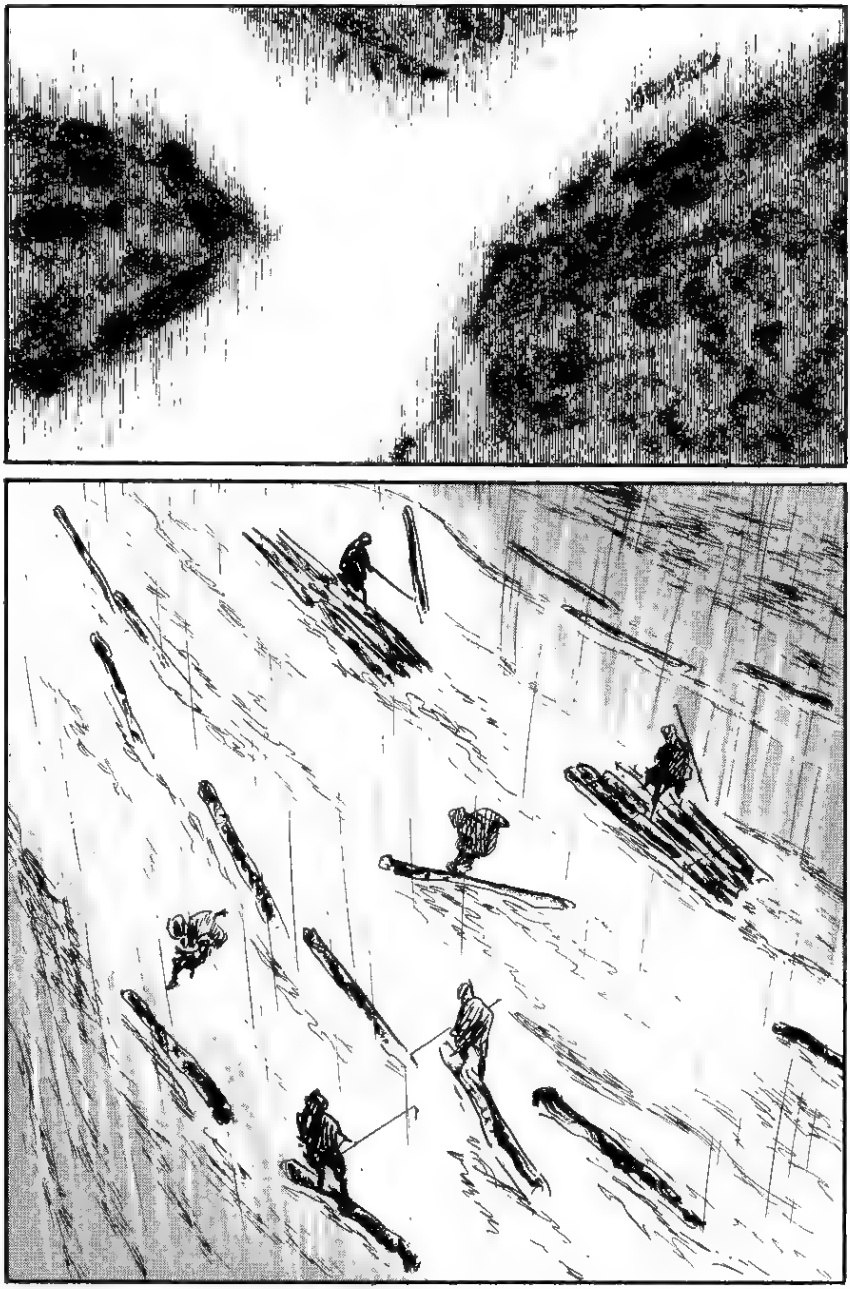

SUNOMATA IS LOCATED ON THE WEST BANK OF NAGARA RIVER, WHERE NAGARA RIVER AND KISO RIVER CONVERGE. IT IS TO THE NORTH OF WHERE SUNOMATA-*CHO* OF ANPACHI-*GUN* IS CURRENTLY LOCATED IN THE SOUTHWEST OF GIFU PREFECTURE.

LET'S RUN ALL THE WAY!
WE MUST JOIN THEM BEFORE THE SUN RISES ON THE FIFTH!
WARMTH... HUH.

ZASHA
ZASHA

HANZŌ-SAA!!
YOU'VE COME!!

IN THE RIVER.
WHERE ARE YOUR IGA FOLK?
I KNEW YOU'D BE QUICK. BUT I DIDN'T EXPECT YOU TO GET HERE BEFORE MY HORSEMEN!
HUH ?!



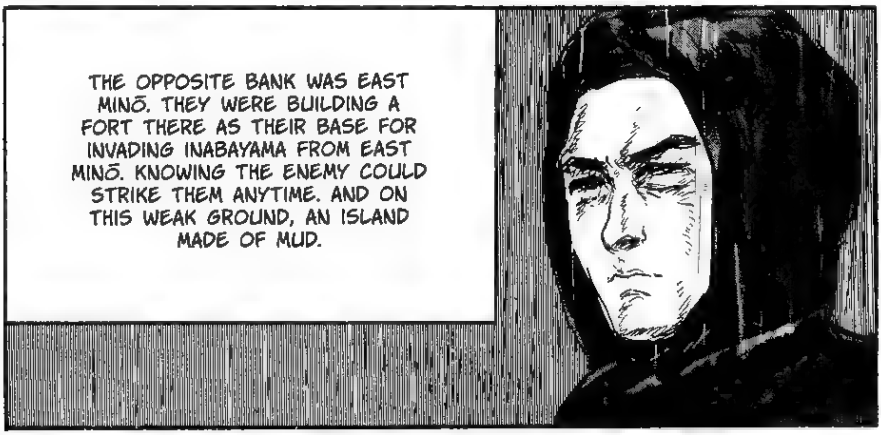
WE'LL CERTAINLY SUCCEED NOW!
WE COULD NEVER DO THAT.
HATS OFF TO THEM! THEY'RE INCREDIBLE!!
THEY... THEY'RE BEYOND HUMAN!
EVERYONE! LET'S GET STARTED! WE MUST NOT SLACK BEHIND THE IGA FOLK!
ASHA

A GOURD IS A POUCH. AND PEOPLE CANNOT ESCAPE POUCHES, YOU SEE.
LOOK HERE. I'M THINKING OF MAKING THIS MY FLAG MARK.
WE COME OUT OF OUR FATHER'S POUCH THAT HOLDS HIS BALLS, AND WE TURN INTO MEN INSIDE OUR MOTHER'S POUCH.
WE GROW, DIGESTING FOOD IN THE POUCH CALLED THE STOMACH, AND WE BECOME ADULTS WHEN WE POSSESS A POUCH OF PATIENCE.

HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA.
...I'LL HAVE A SENNARI BYŌTAN.
SO I WILL ADD A NEW GOURD EVERY TIME I EARN DISTINCTION. AND EVENTUALLY...
INDEED, HE IS A WARM MAN, THOUGHT HANZŌ. BUT HANZŌ FELT HIS WARMTH WAS DIFFERENT THAN IEYASU'S.
I SEE.

"TAKE WARM WATER, FOR EXAMPLE. THE DIFFERENCE IS IN THE TEMPERATURE. WHEN MEN HEAT UP AFTER BATHING IN HOT WATER, THEY CAN ENDURE THE COLD AIR OUTSIDE TO A CERTAIN EXTENT. BUT IF THE WATER IS LUKEWARM, THEY'LL BE CHILLED IN AN INSTANT.
"IT'S EASY TO GET OUT OF HOT WATER, BUT NOT LUKEWARM WATER. SO THE MEN WHO'VE COME TO DIP IN HIDEYOSHI'S HOT WATER MIGHT LEAVE THE MOMENT THEY'RE WARMED.
"MEANWHILE, WE ARE IN IEYASU'S LUKEWARM WATER, AND WON'T BE ABLE TO LEAVE EVEN IF WE WANT TO, UNLESS THE WATER GETS HEATED UP.
"MAYBE HIDEYOSHI IS THE KIND OF MAN WHO CAN NEVER HAVE MANY RIGHT-HAND MEN BECAUSE HE IS TOO HOT..." SO THOUGHT HANZŌ.

...FIRE, I SAY.
HIDEYOSHI-*DONO* IS HOT WATER, AND MY MASTER IS LUKEWARM WATER. NOBUNAGA-*SAMA* IS...


THE OPPOSITE BANK WAS EAST MINŌ. THEY WERE BUILDING A FORT THERE AS THEIR BASE FOR INVADING INABAYAMA FROM EAST MINŌ. KNOWING THE ENEMY COULD STRIKE THEM ANYTIME. AND ON THIS WEAK GROUND, AN ISLAND MADE OF MUD.

IT WILL BE DONE!
CAN IT BE DONE?

WHY WILL WE SUCCEED? BECAUSE OUR ENEMY WILL TAKE TIME.
BECAUSE THEY WANT TO PILLAGE THE LUMBER AND ROCKS. FREE MATERIAL, YOU SEE?
THEY WON'T ATTACK RIGHT AWAY. THEY'LL WAIT UNTIL IT'S ALMOST FINISHED BEFORE THEY STRIKE.
THEIR ERROR IS IN HAVING WAITED EVERY TIME.
BUT THE DIRT IS NOT WORTH TAKING, SO THEY LEAVE THAT BEHIND. THAT'S WHERE THEY MISCALCULATED!

FIRST THE SHIBATA FORCES AND THEN SAKUMA FORCES TRIED TO BUILD A FORT. THE ATTEMPT FAILED TWICE SO FAR, BUT THEY MANAGED TO MOUND THE SOIL!
LOOK AT IT. EVEN THOUGH THE WATER LEVEL HAS INCREASED A LOT, THE ISLAND IS NOT SUBMERGED. THE FOUNDATION IS ALMOST READY.
THE GROUND IS NO LONGER LOOSE!
WE CAN BEGIN BUILDING WITH ONLY A LITTLE MORE MOUNDING. THE ENEMY, ON THE OTHER HAND, GREW USED TO WAITING, AND THEY THINK IT'S THE SAME THIS TIME.

FIVE DAYS?
THEY WOULDN'T EVEN DREAM WE'D FINISH IN FIVE DAYS.
AND THEY ARE NOT JUST AVERAGE SOLDIERS. THEY ARE HIS MEN--HIKOEMON KOROKU'S MEN. THEY ARE *NOBUSERI* WARRIORS FROM KAITŌ-*GUN*.
TWO THOUSAND MEN WILL ARRIVE TOMORROW MORNING. AND THREE THOUSAND MORE TOMORROW NIGHT. THAT'S FIVE THOUSAND TOTAL.
ANOTHER HUGE MISCALCULATION ON THEIR PART IS THAT WE'VE GOT YOUR SUPPORT, TO FIRE MUSKETS ON OUR BEHALF!
OUR ENEMY IS NOT EXPECTING ANYTHING LIKE THIS. HEE HEE HEE.

IF IT'S US FIRING AT THEM WHEN THEY ATTACK AT NIGHT, WE'D BE BLIND SHOOTERS, BUT IGA *SUPPA* WILL NEVER MISS ANY TARGET.
NOT ONLY THAT, YOU CAN SHOOT FROM ANYWHERE.
I COUNT ON YOU, HANZŌ-*SAA*.
WHAP!
LET'S MAKE IT HAPPEN.

I BET THEY'LL ATTACK TONIGHT.
HA HA HA HA HA. THEY'RE SHOCKED, SEEING HOW FAST WE'VE APPROACHED COMPLETION. HA HA HA HA HA.
THEY WILL. HA HA HA HA HA.

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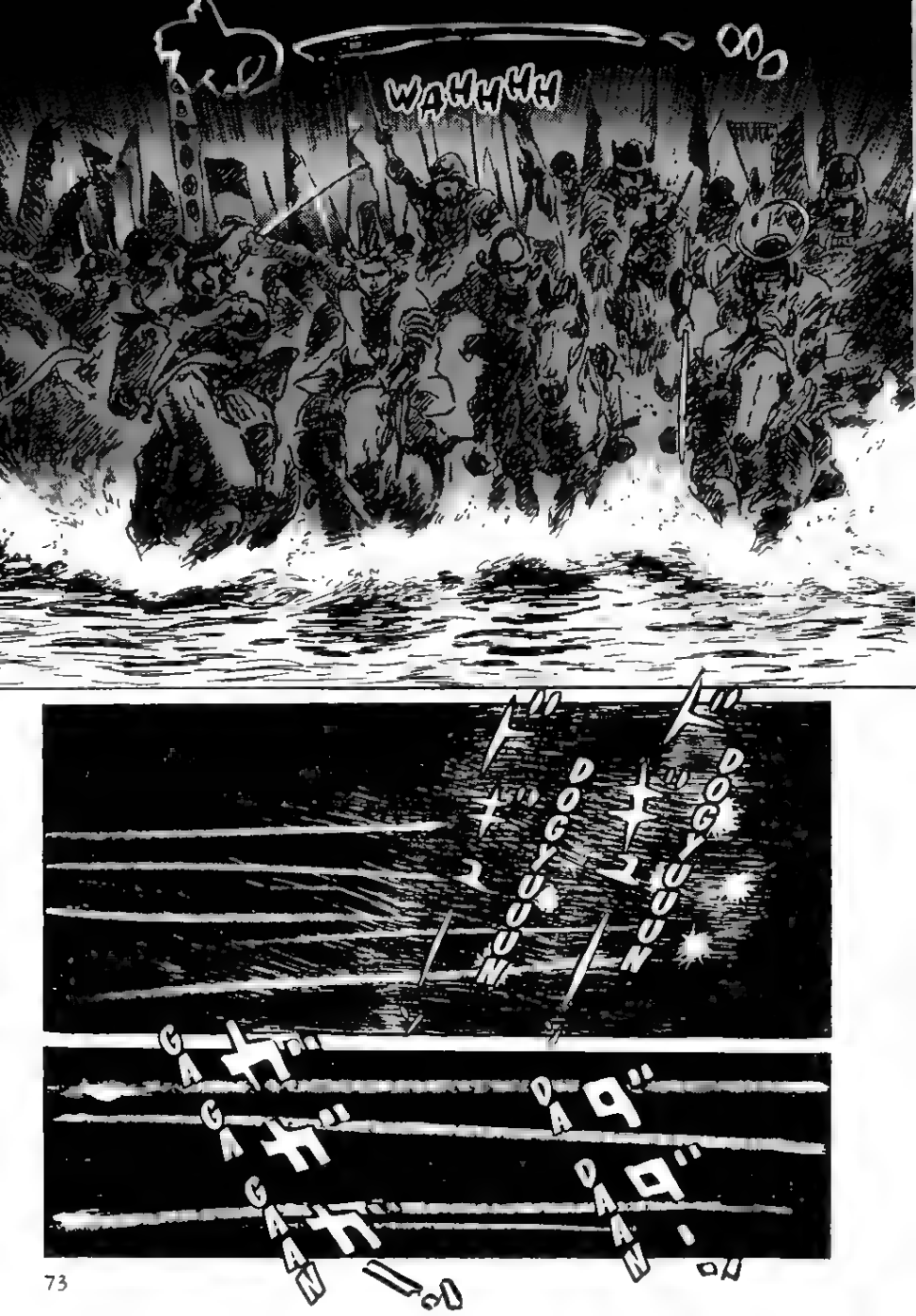
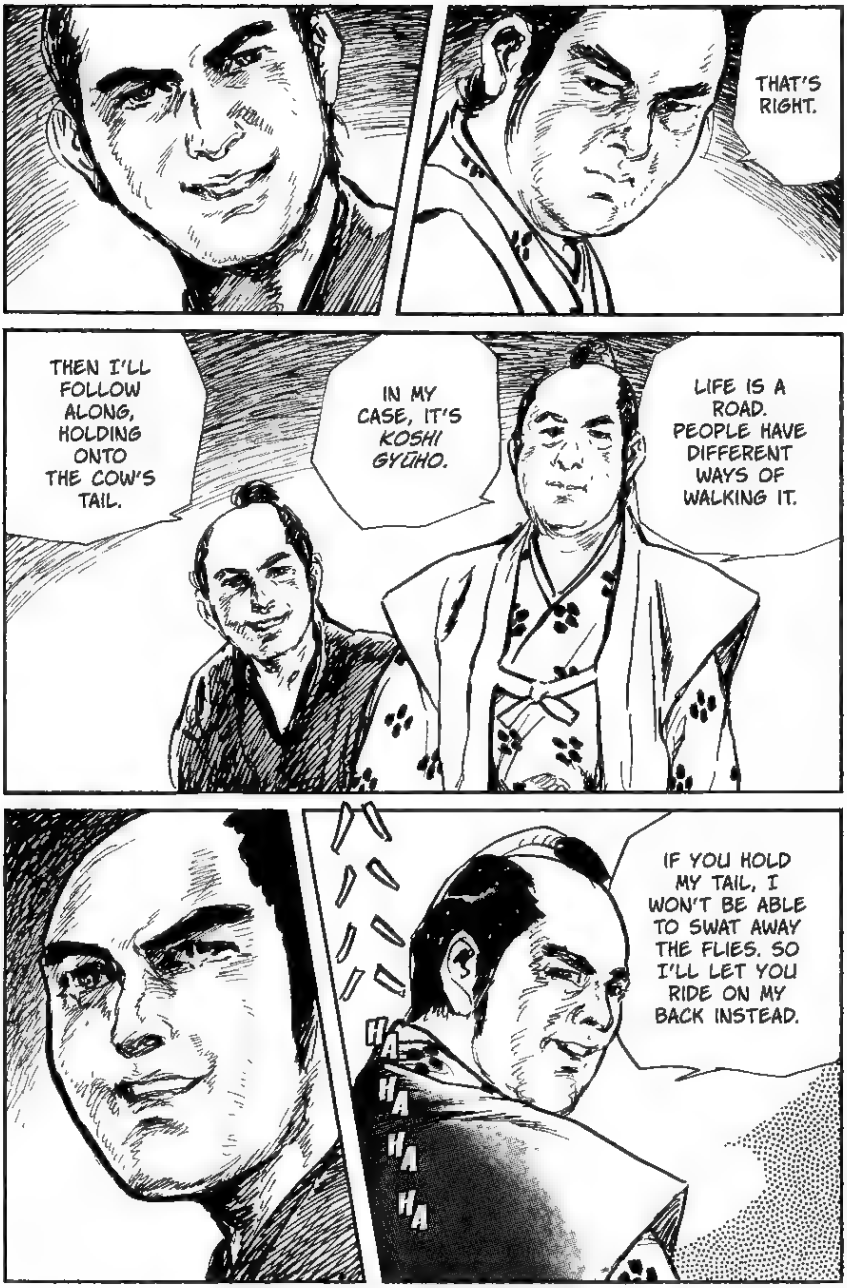

WAHHHH
DOGYUUUN
DOGYUUUN
DOGYUUUN
GAN
GAN
GAN
DAN
DAN
DAN

WAHHHH
ZUDAAN
DA
DAAN

MOVE OUT! ATTACK!
GO! NOW'S OUR CHANCE!

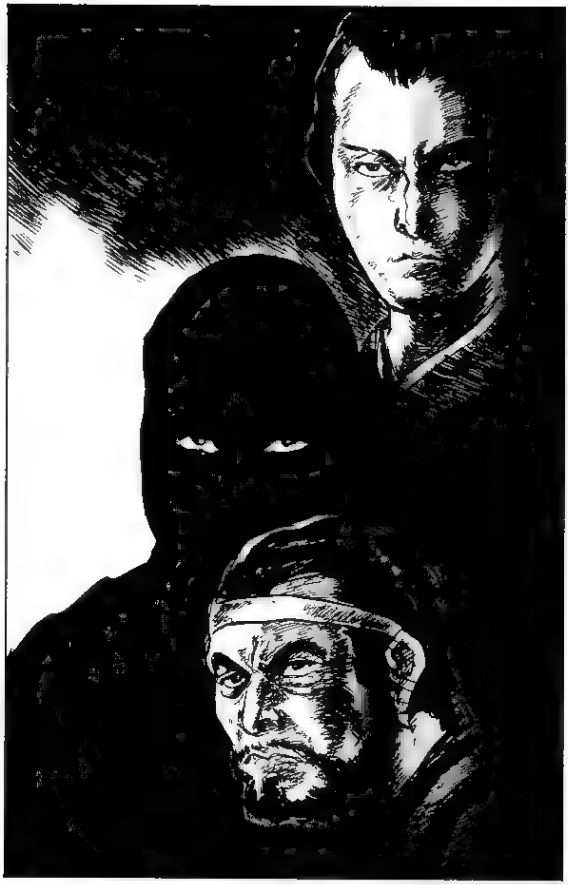
SO THE FORT IS COMPLETE ON SUNOMATA.
I KNEW HIDEYOSHI COULD DO IT.
WHAT'S THE MATTER? YOU DON'T LOOK HAPPY.
IT'S NOTHING.

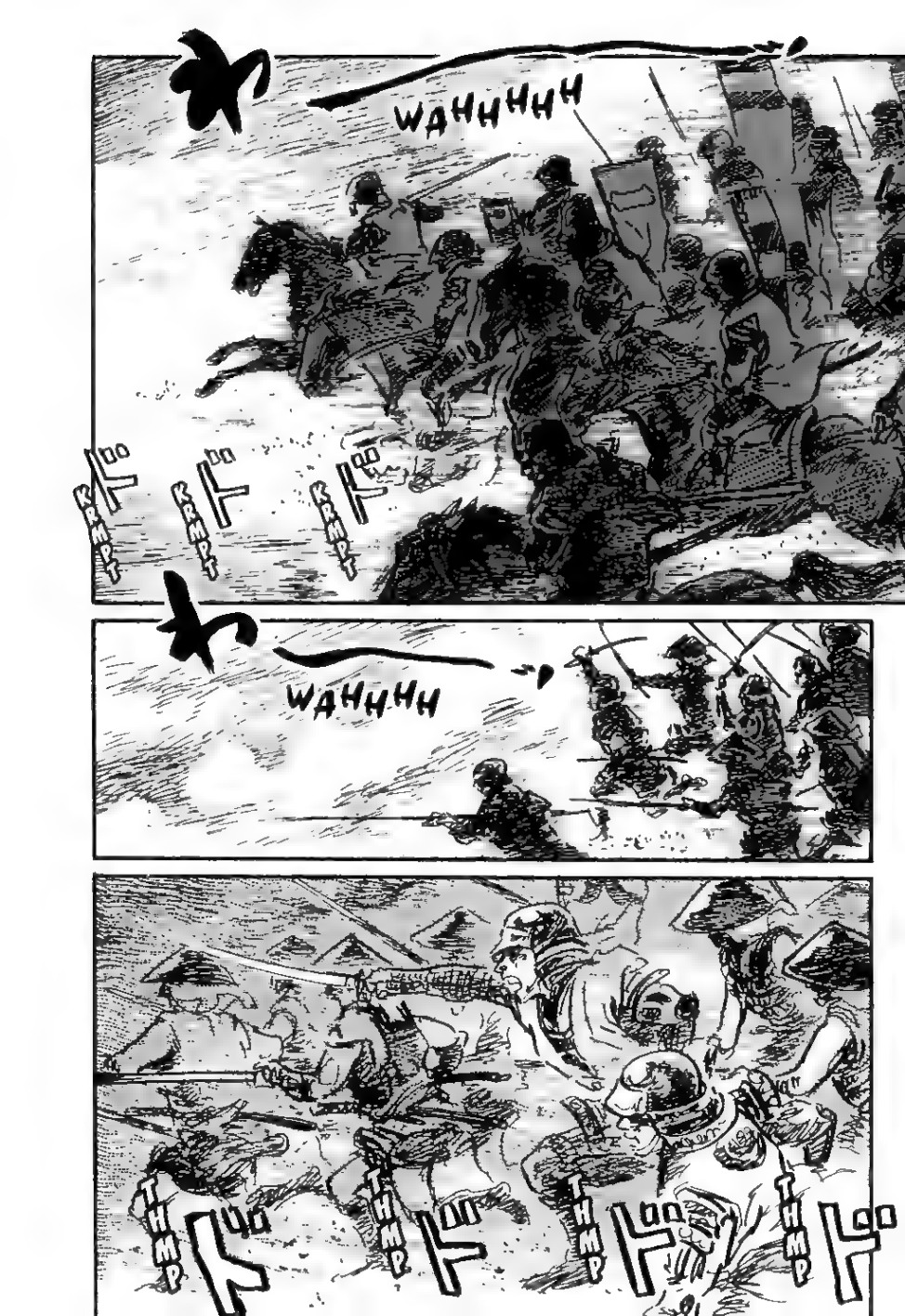
MORE AND MORE I HAVE THE FEELING YOU'LL BE MADE TO TAKE A SUBORDINATE POSITION...
HANZŌ, ARE YOU FEELING ANXIOUS, SEEING HOW FAST AND INTENSELY NOBUNAGA-*DONO* AND HIDEYOSHI ARE CHARGING AHEAD?
AND WALK LIKE A COW! MAKING SURE OF YOUR FOOTING AND TAKING EACH STEP SLOW AND CERTAIN, WITHOUT HASTE. THERE IS NO BETTER WAY TO CONDUCT YOURSELF. TAIGEN SŪFU SESSAI-*SAMA* TAUGHT ME THIS.
THINK OF *KOSHI GYŪHO*. LOOK FIERCELY AHEAD LIKE A TIGER.
STARE LIKE A TIGER AND WALK LIKE A COW!
AND THAT'S HOW I LIVE MY LIFE.


THAT'S RIGHT.
LIFE IS A ROAD. PEOPLE HAVE DIFFERENT WAYS OF WALKING IT.
IN MY CASE, IT'S KOSHI GYŪHO.
THEN I'LL FOLLOW ALONG, HOLDING ONTO THE COW'S TAIL.
IF YOU HOLD MY TAIL, I WON'T BE ABLE TO SWAT AWAY THE FLIES. SO I'LL LET YOU RIDE ON MY BACK INSTEAD.
HA HA HA HA

Chapter On
Esha Jōzi

No. 3: Without Shackles And Without Fear




WAHHHH
KRMPT
KRMPT
KRMPT
WAHHHH
THMP
THMP
THMP
THMP

WAHHH
THMP
THMP
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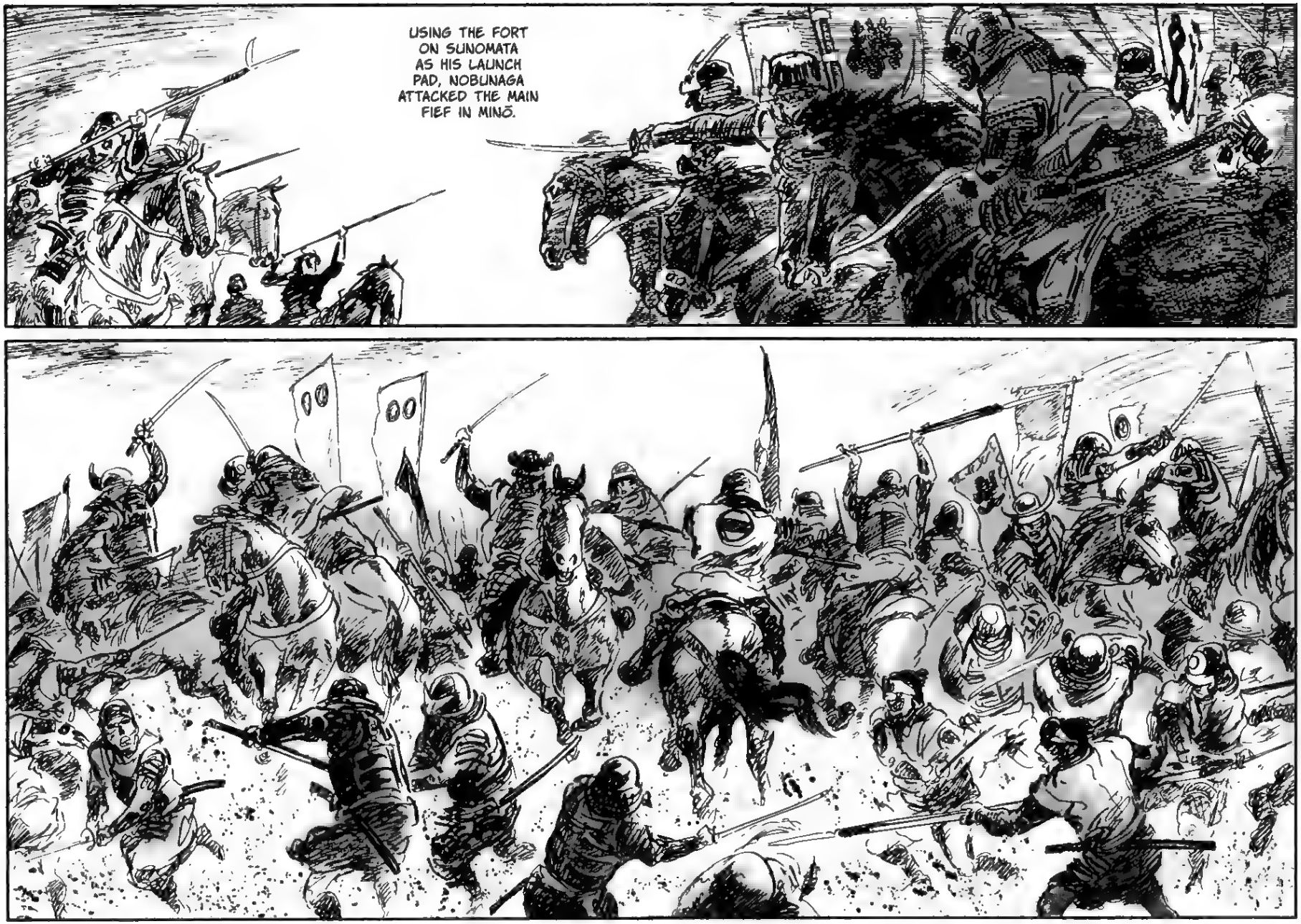
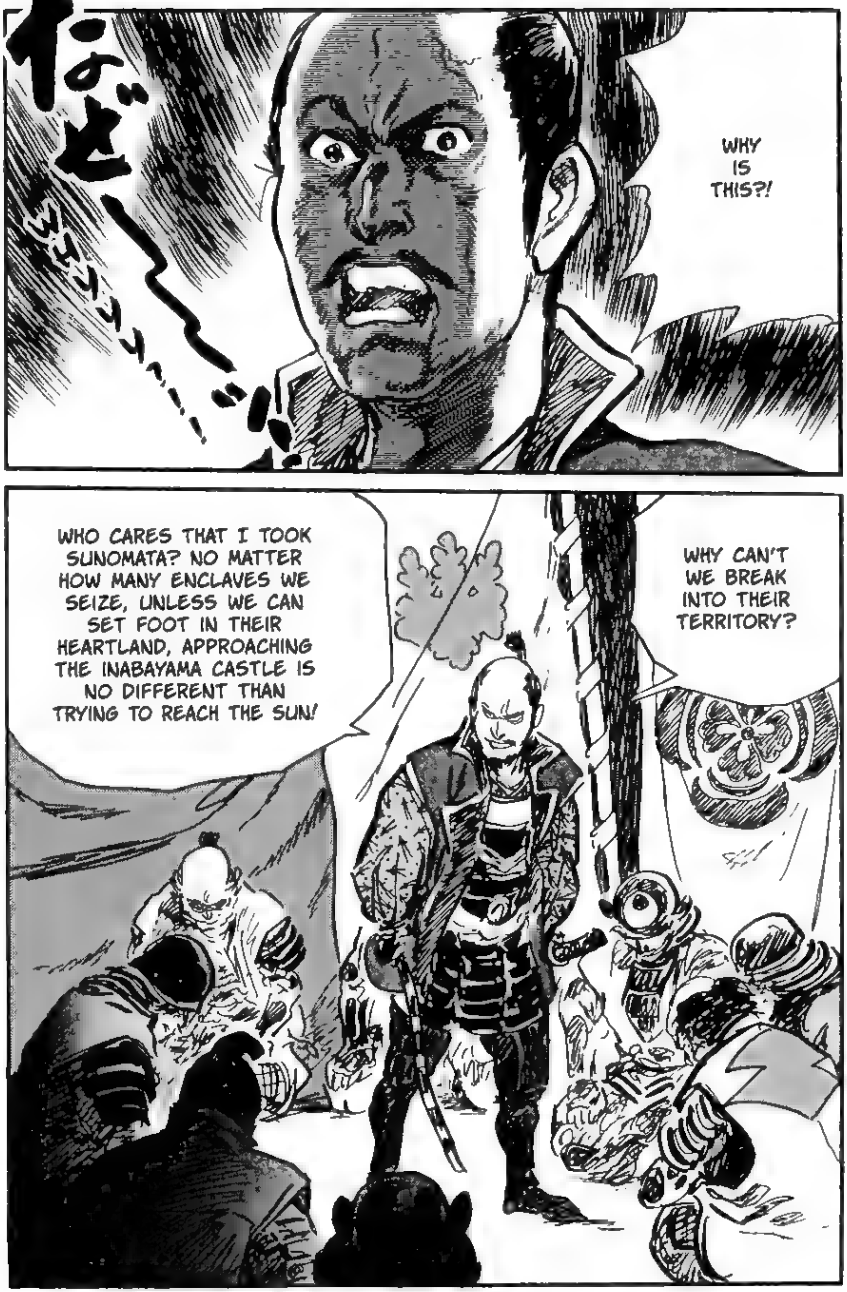
THMP


USING THE FORT ON SUNOMATA AS HIS LAUNCH PAD, NOBUNAGA ATTACKED THE MAIN FIEF IN MINŌ.

BLOTCH

KUNK
KUNK

KNK
BYU
PULL BACK! PULL BACK!!


なぜ
WHY IS THIS?!
WHO CARES THAT I TOOK SUNOMATA? NO MATTER HOW MANY ENCLAVES WE SEIZE, UNLESS WE CAN SET FOOT IN THEIR HEARTLAND, APPROACHING THE INABAYAMA CASTLE IS NO DIFFERENT THAN TRYING TO REACH THE SUN!
WHY CAN'T WE BREAK INTO THEIR TERRITORY?

OUR WEAPONS AND MILITARY STRENGTH ARE SUPERIOR TO THEIRS. WE ALSO HAVE THE MOMENTUM! NOT ONLY THAT, WE'VE GOT SUNOMATA!
WHY?!!
AND YET WE CAN'T MOVE EVEN ONE STEP FORWARD. WHY IS THAT?!
WHAAT!
THERE'S ONE THING YOU OVER-LOOKED.

IT SIMPLY LOOKS LIKE THEY ARE. THAT'S ALL. REMEMBER, WE ARE ON THE OFFENSIVE, WHILE MINŌ IS FIGHTING DEFENSIVELY. IF MINŌ TOOK THE AGGRESSIVE STANCE AND EXERTED ALL THEIR EFFORT, THEIR MILITARY STRENGTH AND WEAPONS WOULD MOST LIKELY EXCEED OURS.
MINŌ IS A GREAT COUNTRY. THEY'RE RICH AND POWERFUL. WE HAVE THE MOMENTUM, INDEED, BUT OUR MILITARY STRENGTH AND WEAPONS ARE NOT SUPERIOR.
SOMEWHERE IN THE MIND OF THE ATTACKERS, THERE IS ALWAYS THE THOUGHT THAT EVEN IF THEY FAIL, THEY'RE NONE THE WORSE FOR IT.
IN ADDITION.
THEY'RE DESPERATE.
PLEASE THINK ABOUT WHAT HAPPENED AT OKEHAZAMA. REMEMBER HOW DESPERATE WE WERE THEN, INCLUDING YOU, MILORD!
BUT HOW DOES THEIR TARGET FEEL?

DESPER-
ATE...
HUH?
INDEED!
MINŌ
HAS
TALENTED
MEN,
I MUST
SAY.
AND...
I AM NOT
YOSHIMOTO.
BUT I DO
UNDERSTAND
WHAT
DESPERATION
MEANS.
UH-HUH.
ANDŌ IGANOKAMI,
INABA IYONOKAMI,
UJIIE HITACHINOSUKE,
AND ŌSAWA
JIRŌZAEMON. ALL
FOUR OF THEM.

EVEN THOUGH HE LIVES IN SECLUSION, WE MUST NOT FORGET TAKENAKA HANBEI SHIGEHARU.
AND...
THE MAN TOOK INABAYAMA CASTLE WITH LESS THAN TWENTY SOLDIERS AND DROVE TATSUOKI OUT TO PROTEST THE SITUATION.
I FORGOT ABOUT HIM COMPLETELY.
FROM WHAT I UNDERSTAND, ANDŌ IGANOKAMI WAS GIVEN A DETAILED PLAN FROM TAKENAKA TO PROTECT MINŌ.
HMPH!
HIS STRATEGY REMAINS ALIVE, YOU MEAN.
BUT THEN HE TOOK RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE ENTIRE MESS HIMSELF AND RETIRED INTO PRIVATE LIFE. STILL...

YES SIR.
IN OTHER WORDS, EMPLOYING REGULAR TACTICS WON'T WORK. IS THAT IT?
...AND ACTUALLY TERMINATE A MAN LIKE TAKENAKA HANBEI?
BUT WHO? WHO COULD STEAL IN SO DEEP IN ENEMY TERRITORY...
INDEED, SIR!
SO WE MUST SEND HIM TO HIS GRAVE?
WHO IS IT?
ONLY ONE.

HATTORI HANZŌ MASANARI, IN IEYASU-SAMA'S MAIN CAMP.
IT'S ALL RIGHT, ISN'T IT? YOU'RE LIKE BROTHERS, AND IN FACT YOU ARE RELATED.
ARE YOU TRYING TO MAKE ME STOOP TO BEG?
HMM...
FINE!

I REFUSE.

I REFUSE EVEN THOUGH IT IS A REQUEST FROM NOBUNAGA-DONO.
SENDING MY VASSAL TO TAKE OUT TAKENAKA OF MINŌ? I WILL NEVER AGREE TO THAT.

WILL YOU AT LEAST GIVE ME A REASON SO I CAN TRY TO BE DIPLOMATIC?
IF YOU SIMPLY SAY NO, IT WILL BRING ABOUT NEEDLESS HOSTILITY.

I IMAGINE HE'LL BECOME NERVOUS THAT IT'S HIS NECK THAT WILL BE CUT NEXT, WHEN HE'S LEAST EXPECTING IT.
LET'S SAY HANZŌ SUCCEEDS IN TERMINATING TAKENAKA. I WONDER HOW NOBUNAGA-*DONO* WILL FEEL ABOUT THAT.
HE WILL ORDER HANZŌ-*DONO'S* DEATH.
BECAUSE THAT'S HOW HE IS...
WHAT IS THE TRUE INTENT BEHIND YOUR VISIT?
IF YOU KNEW THAT ALREADY, WHY DID YOU EVEN ASK?

IEYASU-SAMA, NEITHER OF US HAVE A GOOD REASON--NO EXCUSE FOR REFUSING MY LORD'S REQUEST WITHOUT PROVOKING HIS ANGER.
KNOWING HIS TEMPER...IF YOU REFUSE AFTER HE HAS LOWERED HIMSELF TO ASK FOR YOUR HELP, IEYASU-SAMA...

HMMM.
...IT WILL IRRITATE HIM IN A BIG WAY.
BECAUSE WE CAN'T TELL HIM THE REAL REASON BEHIND YOUR REFUSAL...
IF YOU'RE ASKING ME TO CHOOSE BETWEEN NOBUNAGA-DONO AND MY VASSAL... EVEN IF IT MEANS WE MUST GO TO WAR AGAINST YOU...
NO. EVEN IF IT MEANS MATSUDAIRA'S DEMISE...

OH NO, WAIT.
WHAT?!
IF HATTORI-*DONO* FAILS HIS TASK, THAT WOULD SETTLE THE MATTER, WOULDN'T IT.
I DO.
WE'RE TALKING ABOUT TAKENAKA HANBEI. A GREAT MAN. IT WOULD INDEED BE REGRETTABLE TO SLAY HIM. DON'T YOU AGREE?

I HOPE TO FIND A WAY TO BRING HIM AROUND TO OUR SIDE INSTEAD OF KILLING HIM.
BUT IF I SHARED A THOUGHT LIKE THAT OUTRIGHT WITH MY LORD, HE PROBABLY WOULDN'T PERMIT ME TO TRY.
THAT'S WHY I THOUGHT OF USING HATTORI-*DONO*. IF I COULD MAKE TAKENAKA HANBEI OUT TO BE SO INCREDIBLE THAT EVEN THE BEST OF IGA CANNOT SLAY HIM, HE'D SEEM LIKE TOO GREAT AN ASSET TO DESTROY.
AND THEN I'D SUGGEST TO MY LORD THAT WE SHOULD FIND SOME WAY TO MAKE HIM OUR ALLY INSTEAD.
THEN, IEYASU-*SAMA*, YOU AND HATTORI-*DONO* WILL BE OUT OF HARM'S WAY, AND WE WILL REMAIN AT PEACE.

SHFF
YOU MEAN YOU'LL MAKE ME AND HANZŌ A LAUGHING-STOCK.
AGREED.
IEYASU-SAMA, I SHALL OWE YOU TWO FAVORS. AND THE MOMENT YOU FIND YOURSELF IN TROUBLE, I SHALL PAY THEM BACK WITH MY OWN LIFE.

OR WAS IT YOUR SCHEME FROM THE BEGINNING TO GET TAKENAKA ON YOUR SIDE? WHICH?
KINOSHITA-DONO.
DID YOU COME AS NOBUNAGA-DONO'S ENVOY WITH A PLAN TO TERMINATE TAKENAKA?
THERE IS ONE THING I WOULD LIKE TO KNOW.
BUT I SUPPOSE YOU THOUGHT HE MIGHT POSSIBLY CONSIDER COMING UNDER YOUR WING.
IT'S VERY UNLIKELY THAT TAKENAKA HANBEI SHIGEHARU WILL JOIN ODA.
I DID EVERYTHING HOPING TO DRAW HIM TO OUR SIDE.

IEYASU-SAMA, THIS IS PROBABLY SOMETHING YOU WON'T UNDERSTAND.
BUT I'VE ALWAYS BEEN SNUBBED AND LOOKED DOWN UPON. THAT'S HOW IT IS TODAY.
AND THAT'S HOW IT WILL BE TOMORROW.
THOSE ABOVE ME DESPISE ME OPENLY, AND THOSE BELOW ME HOLD ME IN CONTEMPT BEHIND MY BACK.
NO MATTER HOW IMPRESSIVE MY ACHIEVEMENTS, IT'S THE SAME. BUT WHAT IF I WAS ABLE TO SWAY A MAN LIKE TAKENAKA HANBEI SHIGEHARU? WHAT MIGHT BE THE EFFECT?
WELL, IT WOULD BE THE VERY FIRST TIME THAT PEOPLE START TALKING ABOUT MY CHARACTER AND MY TALENT.

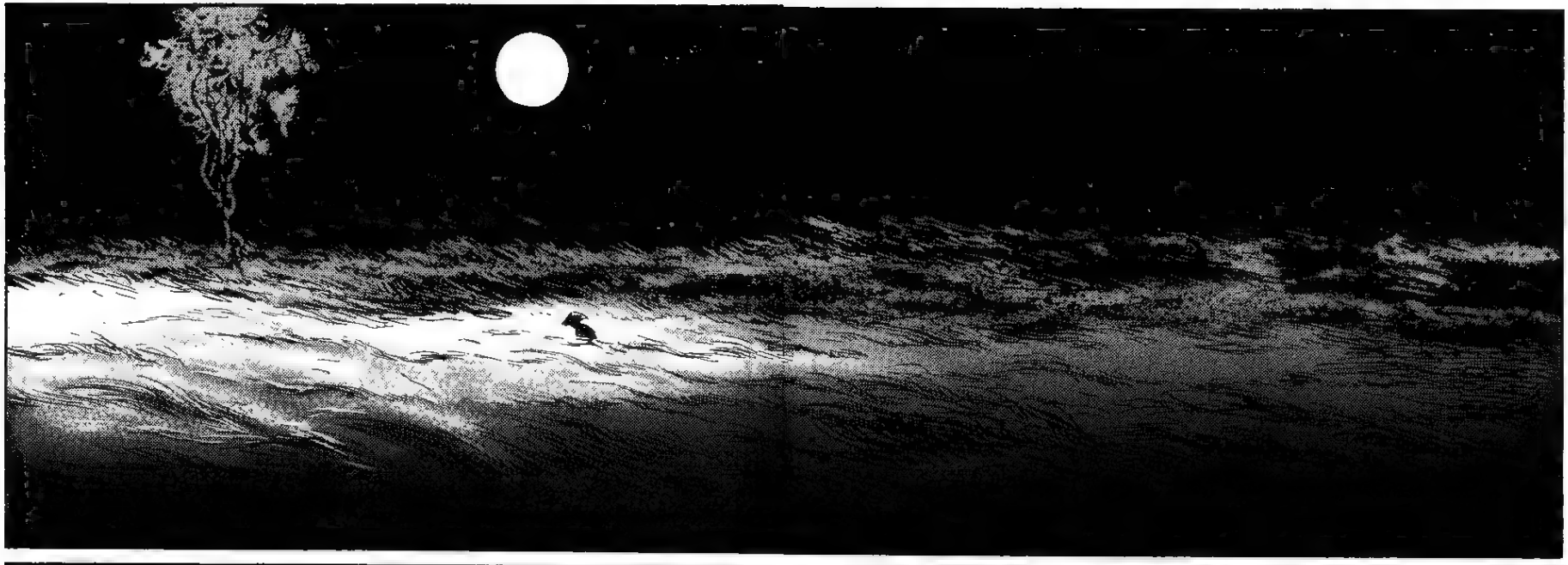
"HOW IMPRESSIVE, THAT HIDEYOSHI GOT A MAN AS REMARKABLE AS TAKENAKA...MAYBE HE IS SOMEONE WITH SPECIAL ABILITY AFTER ALL," THAT'S WHAT THEY'LL SAY.
I DON'T HAVE SO-CALLED RETAINERS.
ONE MORE THING.
THEREFORE, I CAN'T TELL IF MY VASSALS ARE LOYAL ENOUGH TO DIE WILLINGLY FOR ME.
YOU KNOW, MEN WHO BELONGED TO MY FAMILY EVEN BEFORE I WAS BORN.

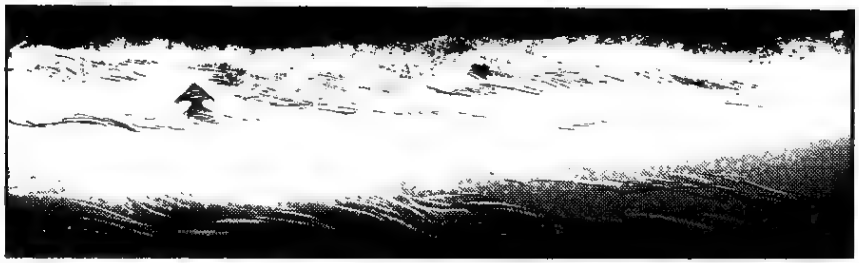
WHAT I HAVE IS A HODGEPODGE OF MEN. THEY'VE ONLY JUST BEGUN TO ATTACH THEMSELVES TO A MAN NAMED HIDEYOSHI. THAT'S WHY I CAN'T KNOW IF THEY'D DIE WITH ME.
IF I CAN ACHIEVE THAT, I WILL BE ABLE TO ATTRACT TRUE VASSALS...THE KIND OF MEN WHO WILL SERVE ME AND BE WITH ME, ALIVE OR DEAD.
THAT'S WHY I HAVE TO BRING SOMEONE AS IMPRESSIVE AS TAKENAKA UNDER MY WING.
I ENVY YOU, IEYASU-SAMA.
THAT'S WHY I'VE STAKED EVERYTHING ON THIS AND WILL DO WHATEVER IT TAKES.

HE TRICKED ME AGAIN.

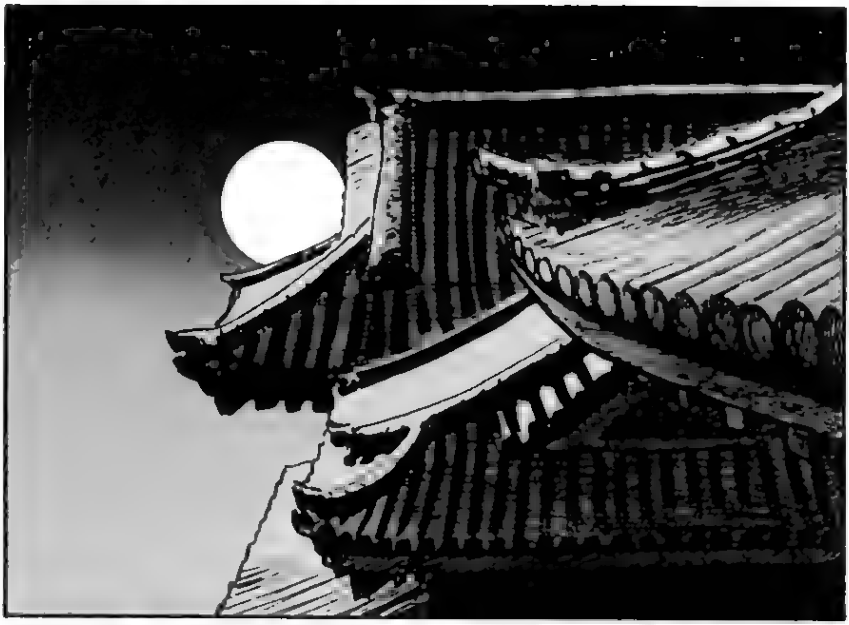
IN COMPARISON, VASSALS WHO BELONG TO A CLAN WON'T LEAVE SO LONG AS THE CLAN EXISTS, EVEN IF THEY LOSE THEIR CURRENT LORD.
BUT INDEED, VASSALS WHO BELONG TO A MAN WILL EVENTUALLY LEAVE ONCE THEY LOSE HIM.
BUT IT'S IMPOSSIBLE FOR A CLAN'S VASSALS TO DO THAT.
BESIDES, A MAN'S VASSALS MIGHT BETRAY HIM...
BECAUSE ALL OF MY VASSALS CAME WITH THE CLAN.
WHEN I THINK ABOUT IT, I AM THE MOST FORTUNATE ONE.

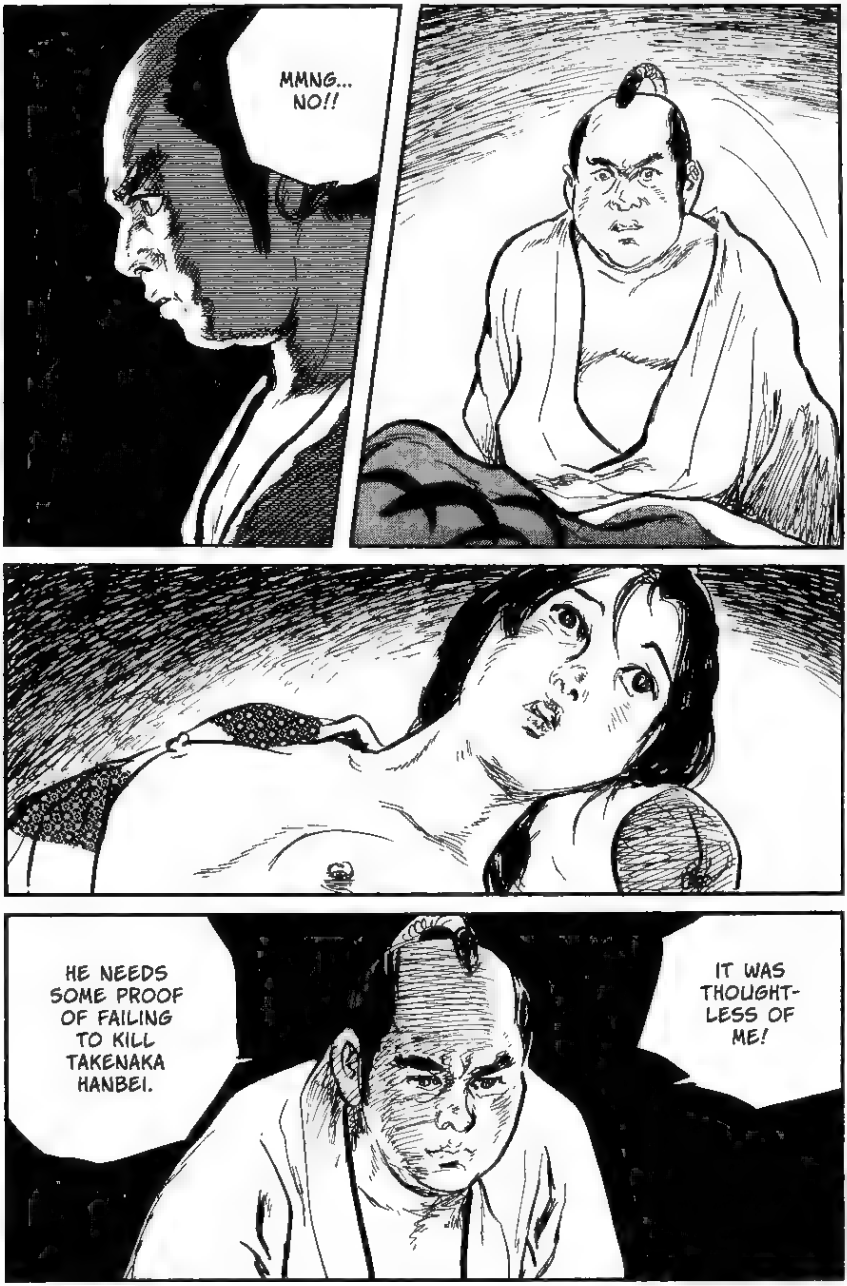
YES SIR.
YOU'LL HELP HIDEYOSHI YET AGAIN!
HANZŌ! LEAVE FOR MINŌ.
...ME.
IT'S NO WONDER HE ENVIES...





I'M BEING FOL- LOWED.




MMNG... NO!!
HE NEEDS SOME PROOF OF FAILING TO KILL TAKENAKA HANBEI.
IT WAS THOUGHT-LESS OF ME!

WITHOUT PROOF, HOW WILL NOBUNAGA-DONO BE CONVINCED?
HIDEYOSHI! HE PULLED A FAST ONE ON ME!
BUT... WAIT.
HIDEYOSHI WOULDN'T MAKE AN ENEMY OF ME...
COMPARING ME TO TAKENAKA HANBEI, AND CHOOSING TAKENAKA OVER ME... THAT'S MOST UNLIKELY.
HANZŌ'S DEATH IS WHAT WILL ATTEST IT!

HMPH.
BESIDES... GAINING ONE MAN BY LOSING ANOTHER MAKES NO SENSE, AND NO GENERAL WOULD DO THAT.
NOW, HOW IS HE GOING TO PROVE HANZŌ'S FAILURE TO NOBUNAGA-DONO?

HOW ...?!
HOW?!
MMG.

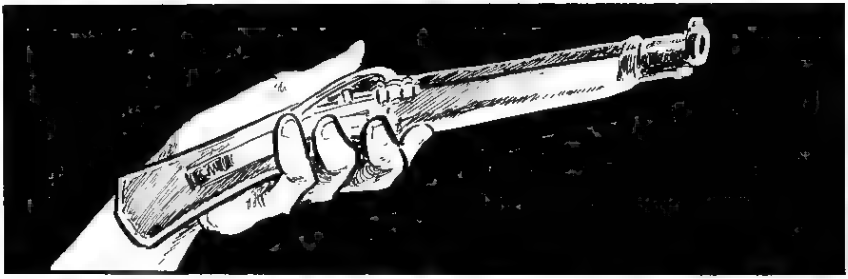
NOW...
UNLESS TAKENAKA HANBEI KILLS ME FIRST, MY FAILURE CANNOT BE PROVEN.
DOES THAT MEAN I MUST DIE?
NOBUNAGA-*DONO* WILL NOT BELIEVE IT OTHERWISE.

NO, THAT CAN'T BE THE CASE.
DID MY LORD SEND ME HERE KNOWING THAT?!
KINOSHITA-*DONO* ISN'T THE KIND OF MAN WHO'D DO SOMETHING LIKE THAT EITHER.
BUT THEN, HOW ...?!
I GUESS THE ANSWER IS WHAT'S SHADOWING ME.

HM?!
ARGH!!

I BELIEVE YOU ARE A VASSAL OF KINOSHITA-SAMA NAMED HACHISUKA KOROKU!
WOW!

GOT IT!!
HANZŌ WON'T BE ABLE TO ASSASSINATE TAKENAKA EVEN IF HE TRIES HIS HARDEST.
HE'S COMPARING HANZŌ AND TAKENAKA!
HE ISN'T COMPARING ME AND TAKENAKA.
NOT ONLY THAT, TAKENAKA HANBEI ISN'T THE KIND OF MAN WHO'LL KILL HANZŌ. THAT'S WHAT HIDEYOSHI FIRMLY BELIEVES!
HM...
IS TAKENAKA THAT GOOD?

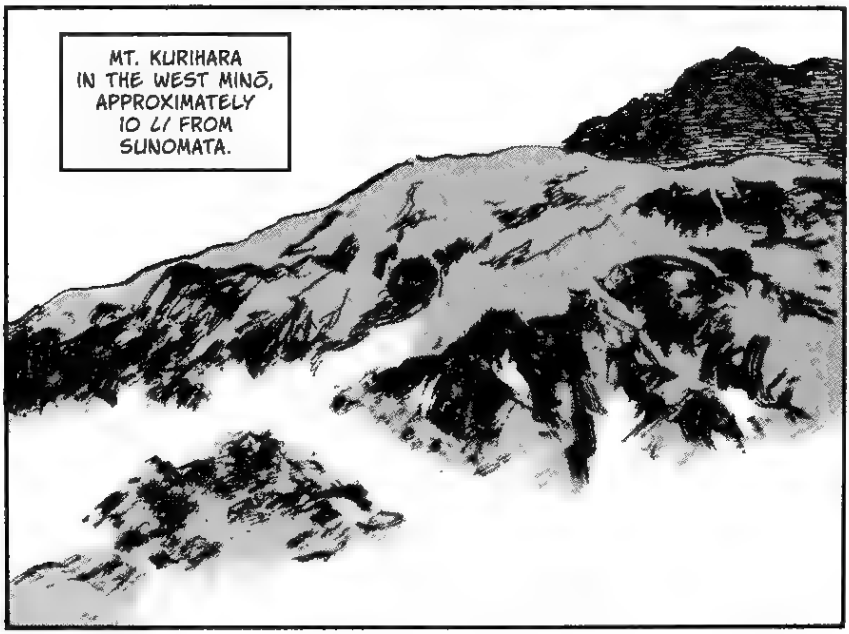


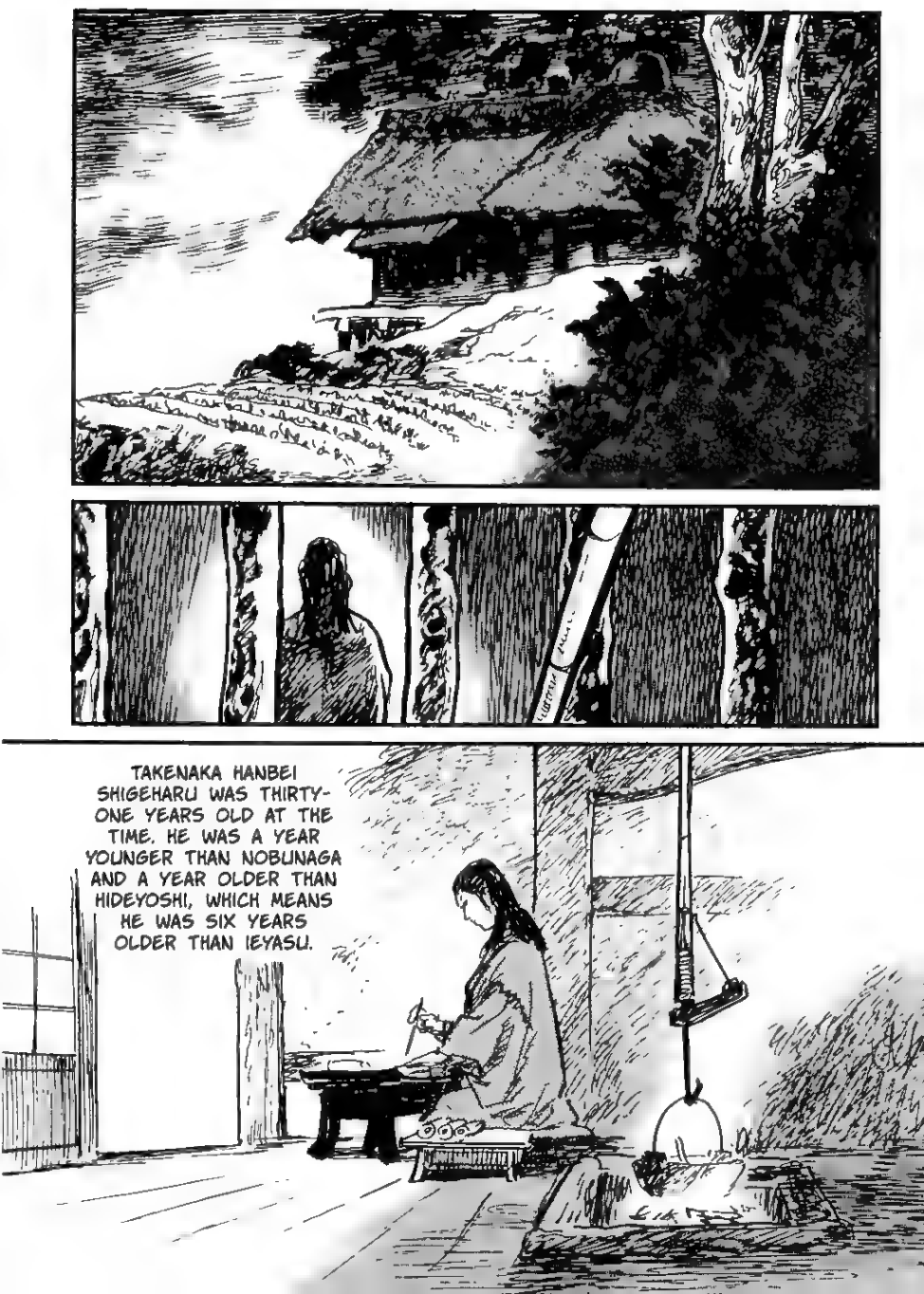
IF HE TRIES TO KILL YOU, I'M SUPPOSED TO SHOOT HIM WITH THIS.
IF IT LOOKS LIKE TAKENAKA HANBEI WON'T LET YOU LEAVE ALIVE...

KINOSHITA-SAMA THINKS TAKENAKA WILL CAPTURE ME THEN.
IN OTHER WORDS, HE IS A SMALL FISH AND NO LONGER WANTED, SO I'M TO TRY EVERYTHING TO SLAY HIM. THOSE ARE THE ORDERS I WAS GIVEN.
IF HE IS SOMEONE WHO'D STRIKE BACK AND DESTROY AN ASSASSIN, HIS DEPTH IS FATHOMABLE.

MILORD IS GUESSING THAT TAKENAKA IS THE KIND OF HERO WHO WILL NOT KILL YOU EVEN IF HE CAPTURES YOU. INSTEAD, TAKENAKA WILL SEND A MESSAGE TO NOBUNAGA-SAMA.
THE MESSAGE FROM MY MASTER IS, YOU MUST ATTACK IN SUCH A WAY THAT YOU'LL BE CAUGHT.
BLAMM
BUT IF IT DOESN'T WORK OUT THAT WAY, I'VE GOT THIS!
IN A NUTSHELL, KINOSHITA-SAMA THINKS I COULD NEVER DEFEAT TAKENAKA HANBEI EVEN IF I USE ALL MY SKILLS.
IT'S IMPOSSIBLE TO ATTACK IN A WAY THAT I'LL BE CAUGHT.

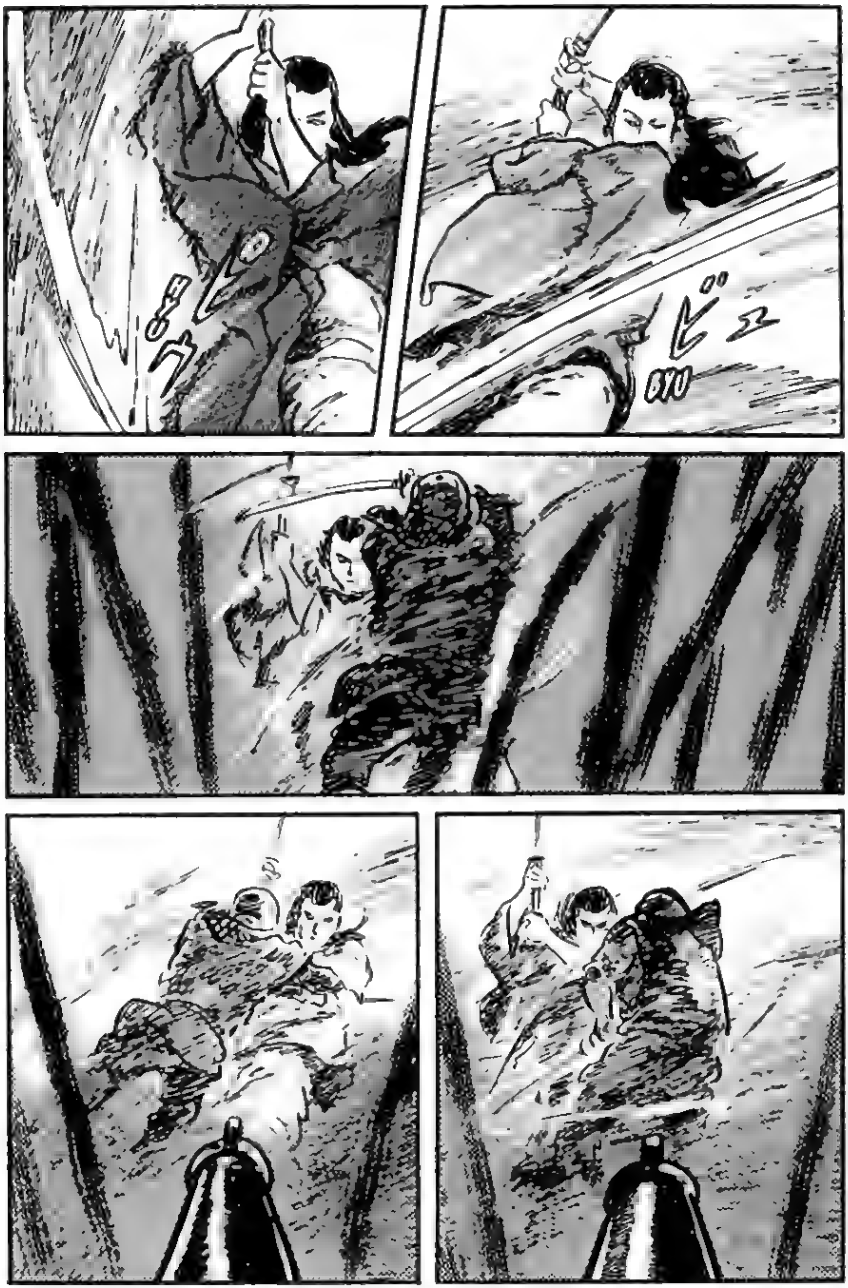
AND ONCE I'M CAUGHT AND TAKENAKA HANBEI SENDS WHATEVER MESSAGE HE WANTS TO NOBUNAGA-DONO... THAT WILL PROVE MY FAILURE...
I SEE.
HEE HEE HEE HEE. SO I'M THE ONE HE JUDGED AGAINST. HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA.
I MUST SAY YOU ARE.
DON'T YOU THINK ?!
I'M TAKING THE REAL BEATING HERE...
HA HA HA HA HA HA HA.


MT. KURIHARA IN THE WEST MINŌ, APPROXIMATELY 10 LI FROM SUNOMATA.


TAKENAKA HANBEI SHIGEHARU WAS THIRTY-ONE YEARS OLD AT THE TIME. HE WAS A YEAR YOUNGER THAN NOBUNAGA AND A YEAR OLDER THAN HIDEYOSHI, WHICH MEANS HE WAS SIX YEARS OLDER THAN IEYASU.

BASH
ASSASSINS BEFORE BREAKFAST, HUH?

BYU
BYU



...HANBEI.
I CAN'T AIM AT...
CRAP!! THE TARGET'S BLOCKED...
UNLESS HANZŌ GOES AROUND THE OTHER SIDE AND MAKES HANBEI TURN HIS BACK ON ME...
WHETHER OR NOT HE'S AWARE OF KOROKU AIMING AT HIM, HE SURE KEEPS ME IN FRONT OF THE GUN.

HE MOVES AS IF HE'S USING ME AS HIS SHIELD. IF HE'S DOING IT CONSCIOUSLY, HE IS SO SKILLED THAT I AM LIKE A CHILD BEFORE HIM.
WHAT IF...
HE SIMPLY DODGES AND DOESN'T TRY TO STRIKE. I CAN BARELY EVEN GRASP HIS ABILITY. WHAT IF...
I MUST FIND OUT...
BUT HE CAN'T BE THAT UNTOUCHABLE. NOT AGAINST SOMEONE AS CAPABLE AS I AM...

ALL RIGHT. I'LL JUMP TO THE OPPOSITE SIDE AND MAKE HIM TURN HIS BACK ON THE GUN.

IT'S TOO DANGEROUS TO JUMP SO HIGH AND RUN THROUGH THE AIR!
MMNG. WITH HIS SWORD UP LIKE THAT, I CAN'T LEAP OVER.
A...A MAN LIKE HANZŌ OF IGA...MUST KNOW THAT, OF COURSE.
PLEASE, HANZŌ-*DONO*! FIGHT HIM... WITHOUT BLOCKING MY AIM.
IT'S... IMPOSSIBLE.
DOES THAT MEAN HANBEI IS MAKING HIM BLOCK ME?
B...BUT...

MM?!

URK...I... I THOUGHT I JUMPED TO HIS OTHER SIDE...
IT'S AS IF WE SWAPPED BODIES...
AM I STILL... BLOCKING THE GUN...?

AHH
WHOA!
HE'LL BE KILLED!
KA-BLAM!

NO ONE BUT ODA-DONO WOULD SEND ASSASSINS AFTER ME.

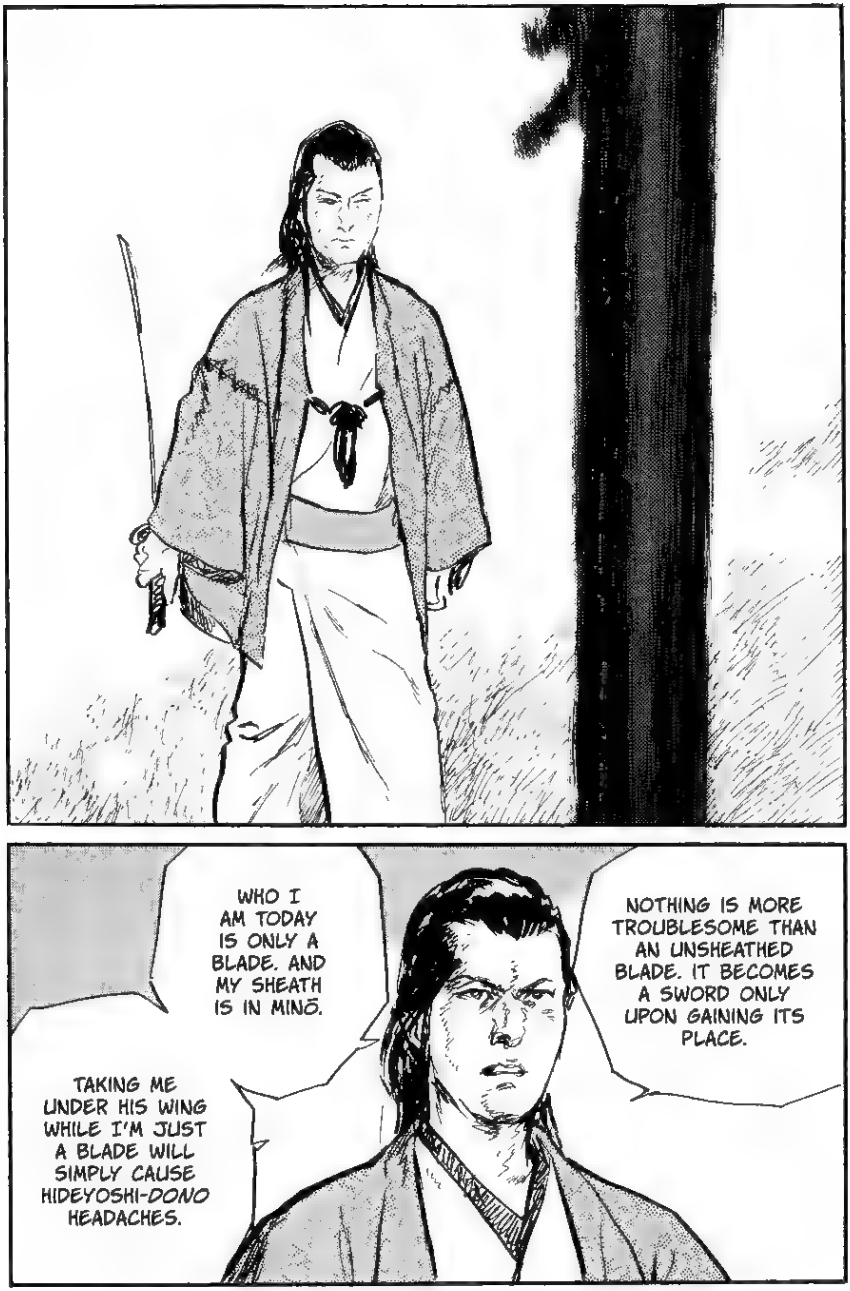
EVEN IF THAT LITTLE BUG COULD POSSIBLY BREAK DOWN A LEVEE, HE WOULDN'T SEND ASSASSINS TO STAMP ON IT. THAT'S JUST HIS NATURE.
BUT NOBUNAGA-DONO WOULDN'T BOTHER WITH AN ANT.
HEH HEH HEH.
THEN WHO?
BESIDES, I AM AN ANT LEFT IN THE WILDERNESS. I SHOULD BE NOWHERE IN NOBUNAGA-DONO'S MIND.
ESPECIALLY WHEN I'M SO FOCUSED ON PROTECTING A LEVEE CALLED MINŌ RIGHT NOW.

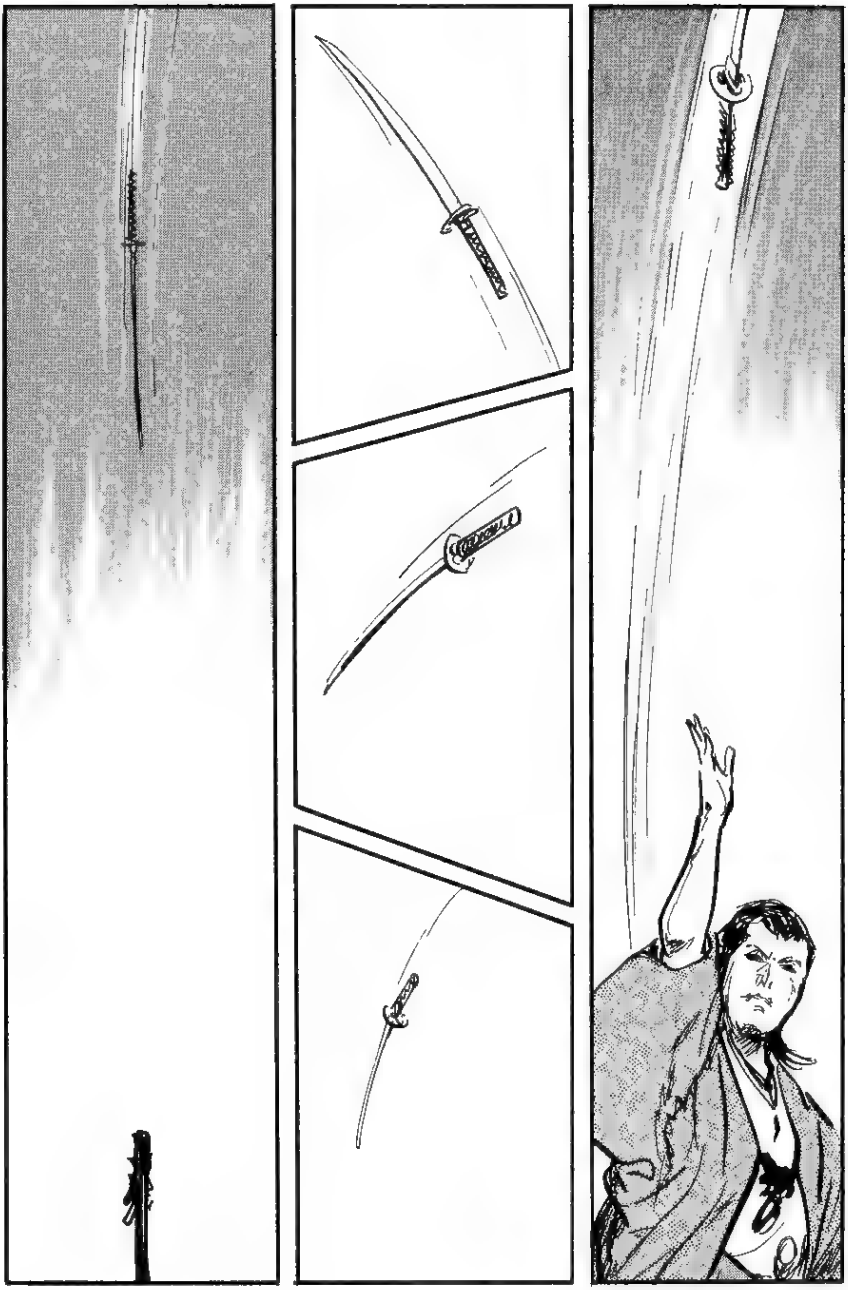
AND YOU ARE HACHISUKA KOROKU, A RIGHT-HAND MAN OF KINOSHITA TŌKICHIRŌ HIDEYOSHI OF ODA CLAN.
YOU ARE HATTORI HANZŌ OF IGA, A VASSAL OF IEYASU-*DONO* OF MIKAWA.
AH HA HA HA HA HA HA HA.
YOU TWO GIVE OFF THE DISTINCT SMELL OF *SUPPA*.

...I WILL LISTEN TO WHATEVER HIDEYOSHI-DONO WANTS TO SAY.
IF YOU CAN KNOCK DOWN THAT SHEATH OVER THERE WITH YOUR KUNAI OR YOUR PISTOL...
IT'S TOO FAR TO STRIKE WITH A KUNAI, AND TOO THIN TO HIT WITH A BULLET. HEH HEH HEH.

MMG!

URRK...
IT'S NO GOOD! IMPOSSIBLE TO BEGIN WITH.


WHO I AM TODAY IS ONLY A BLADE. AND MY SHEATH IS IN MINŌ.
NOTHING IS MORE TROUBLESOME THAN AN UNSHEATHED BLADE. IT BECOMES A SWORD ONLY UPON GAINING ITS PLACE.
TAKING ME UNDER HIS WING WHILE I'M JUST A BLADE WILL SIMPLY CAUSE HIDEYOSHI-*DONO* HEADACHES.



ヒュ
ゴォ

WOW
OW
OW...
URK...
YOU
UNDER-
STAND?
CHINK

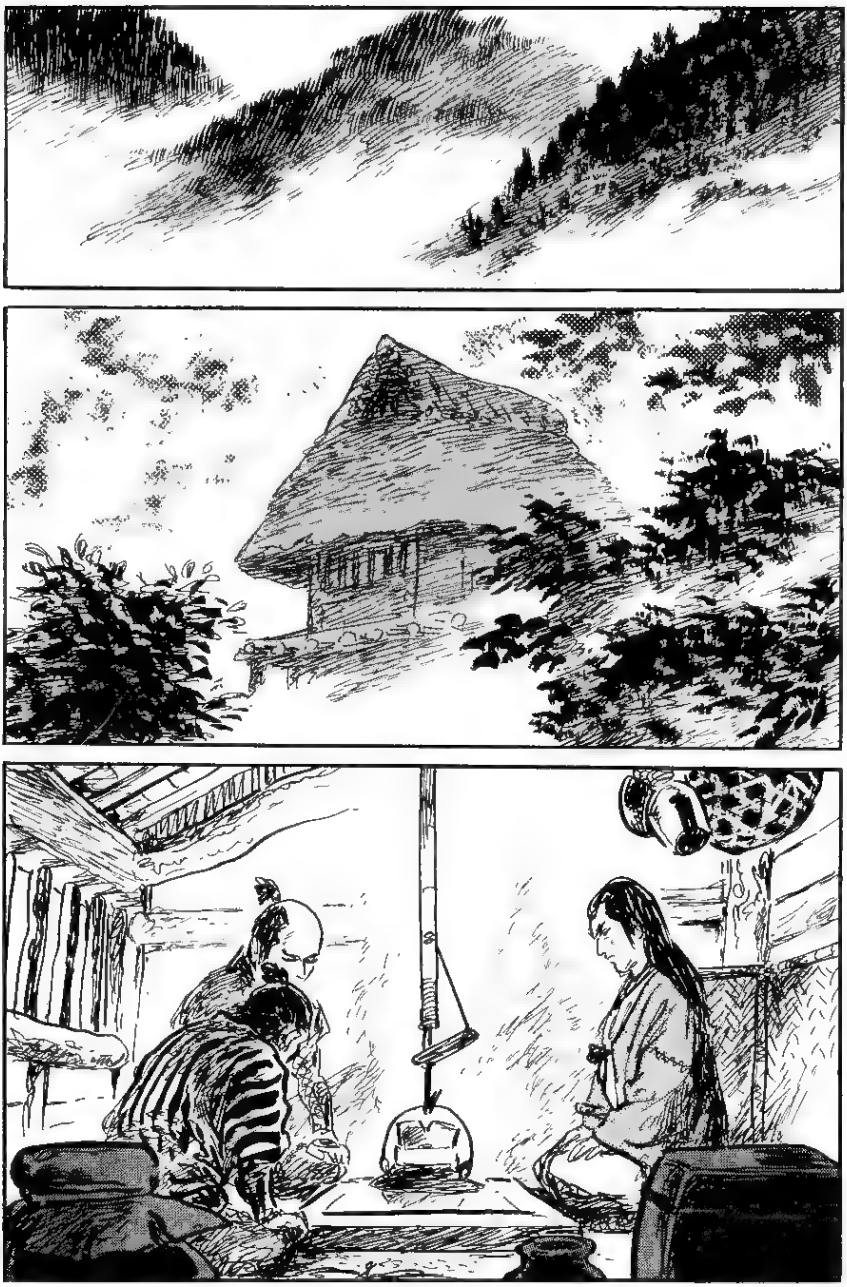
YOU AIMED AT THE SHEATH WITH YOUR KUNAI.
KOROKU-DONO, TOO, AIMED HIS GUN.
HOW...DID YOU KNOW... I'M A VASSAL OF MIKAWA?

IT WAS THE SAME AS STATING YOUR NAMES.
AFTER I VOICED WHAT WAS ONLY A HUNCH, YOU PROVED ME RIGHT BY YOUR ACTIONS.

HA HA HA HA HA HA HA.

MY MOUNTAIN COTTAGE DOESN'T HAVE MUCH TO OFFER, BUT LET'S HAVE A DRINK. PLEASE COME THIS WAY.
KOROKU'S WORDS EXPRESSED HANZŌ'S THOUGHTS EXACTLY. IF TAKENAKA HANBEI WAS HUMAN, HE WAS LIKE KONGMING, THE MILITARY ADVISOR OF SHU-HAN, WHOM HANZŌ'S FATHER TOLD HIM ABOUT WHEN HE WAS A BOY.
IS...IS HE HUMAN?

BUT AT THE MOMENT, HE FELT THAT LIVING PROOF STOOD BEFORE HIM.
AS A BOY, HANZŌ WAS DOUBTFUL THAT SUCH GIANTS COULD EXIST IN REAL LIFE...
HANZŌ FELT HIS LIMBS PETRIFY. HE KNEW HE DIDN'T STAND A CHANCE AGAINST HANBEI.
THEY EXIST.
THE WORLD IS BIG. THERE ARE MEN LIKE HIM.



NOW IT'S MY TURN TO DEAL WITH YOU.
YOU'VE TREATED ME WITH *KUNAI* AND A BULLET BEFORE BREAKFAST.
I DON'T HAVE MUCH TO OFFER, BUT THE *SAKE* THEY BREW AROUND HERE IS PRETTY GOOD.
I'M JUST TEASING.
PLEASE.

SO HE FIRST SUGGESTS KILLING ME...AND RECOMMENDS USING IEYASU-DONO'S VASSAL, HATTORI HANZŌ-DONO, FOR THE JOB.
HIDEYOSHI-DONO WANTS TO TAKE ME IN. BUT KNOWING NOBUNAGA-DONO'S NATURE, IT WON'T BE PERMITTED. BESIDES, THERE'S THE CHANCE THAT NOBUNAGA-DONO MIGHT LURE ME AWAY FROM HIM.

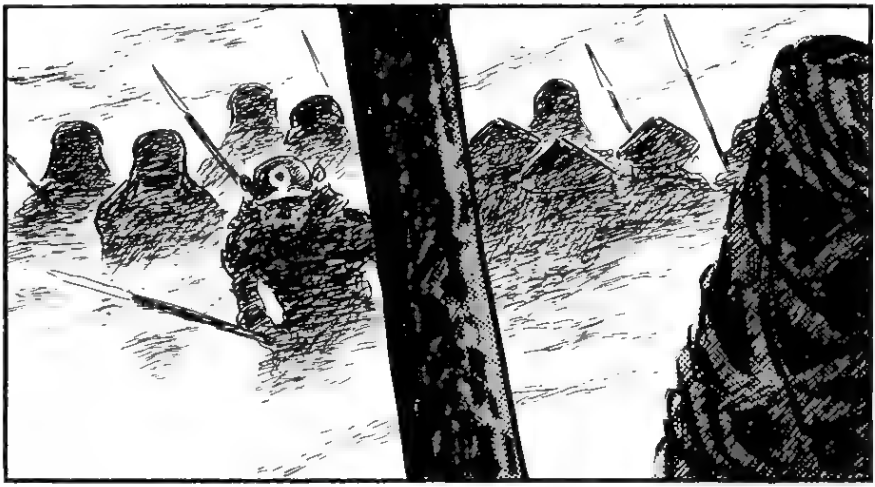
ONCE IEYASU-DONO WAS INVOLVED, NOBUNAGA-DONO COULD NEVER STEAL ME AWAY AFTER I WAS ALLIED WITH HIDEYOSHI-DONO.
WHY DID HE WANT A VASSAL OF ANOTHER CLAN TO HELP HIM? TO SECURE A WITNESS FOR NOBUNAGA-DONO.
BEING AWARE OF IEYASU-DONO, NOBUNAGA-DONO WOULDN'T DARE ACT SO SELFISHLY.
THAT'S WHY HE SENT KOROKU-DONO TO FOLLOW BEHIND.
THERE WOULD BE NO POINT IF I ENDED UP DEAD. BUT IF I ENDED UP KILLING HANZŌ-DONO, HE WOULD HAVE NO EXCUSE TO MAKE TO IEYASU-DONO.

AM I WRONG?
OF COURSE, AT THE BOTTOM OF HIDEYOSHI-*DONO'S* HEART IS HIS BELIEF THAT EVEN THE TWO OF YOU TOGETHER COULDN'T BEAT ME.
ANYHOW, THAT'S HOW IT TURNED OUT, AND NOW WE'RE SHARING A LITTLE *SAKE*.

SHLUP
SHLUP
HE KNEW I WOULDN'T KILL YOU. AND HE THINKS I WILL SEND YOU BACK WITH WORDS FOR NOBUNAGA-*DONO*. HEH HEH HEH.

AND HERE'S MY GUESS AS TO WHAT WILL HAPPEN NEXT. UPON LEARNING WHAT I SAID, NOBUNAGA-*DONO* WILL BE DEEPLY TOUCHED.
WITHOUT SHACKLES AND WITHOUT FEAR. THAT MIGHT DO.
NOW ABOUT THAT... I WONDER WHAT A NOBODY LIKE ME COULD SAY TO A RISING SUN LIKE NOBUNAGA-*DONO*.
AND HE'LL SAY..."HE IS TOO GOOD TO KILL."
HIDEYOSHI-*DONO* WILL MAKE SURE OF THAT.

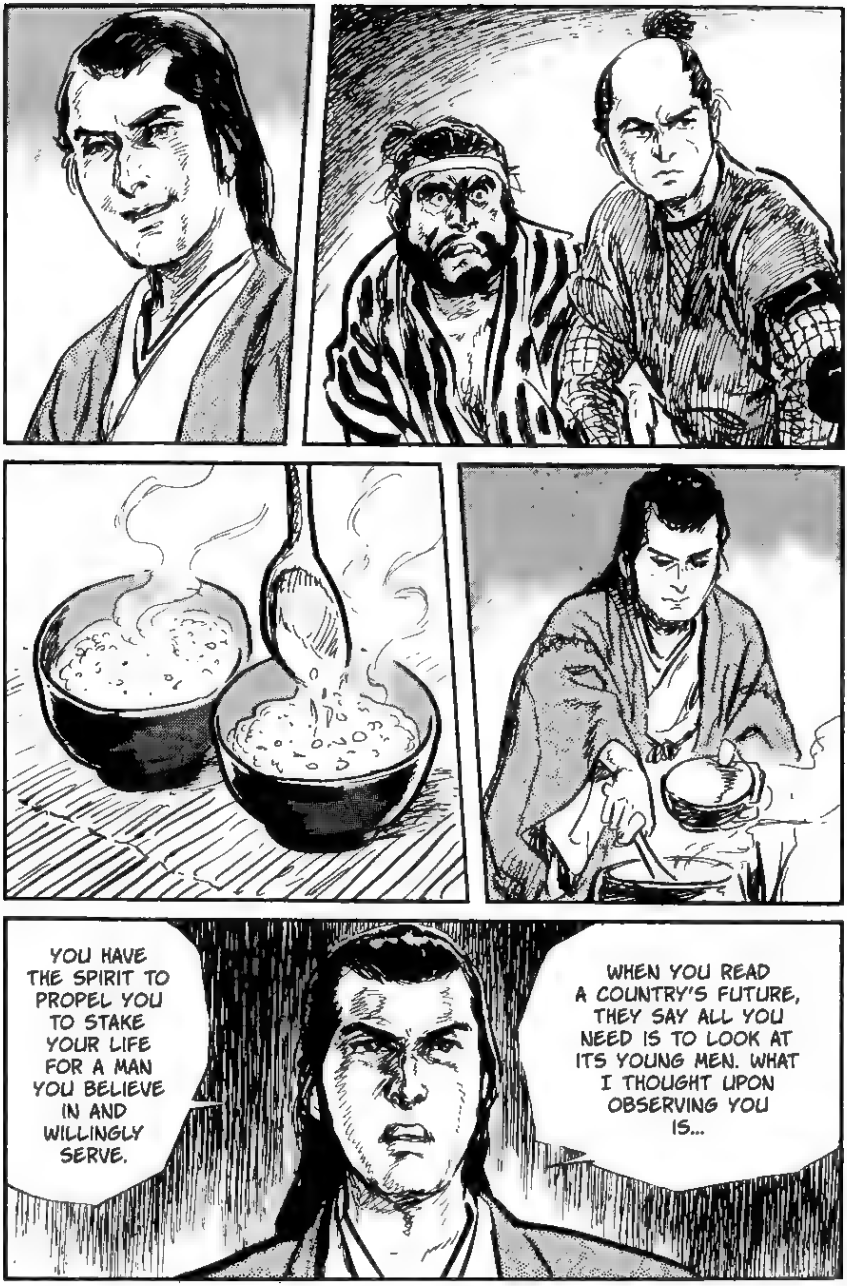
"LET ME PERSUADE HIM TO JOIN MY RANKS." THAT'S HOW HIDEYOSHI-*DONO* WILL HAVE HIS WAY.



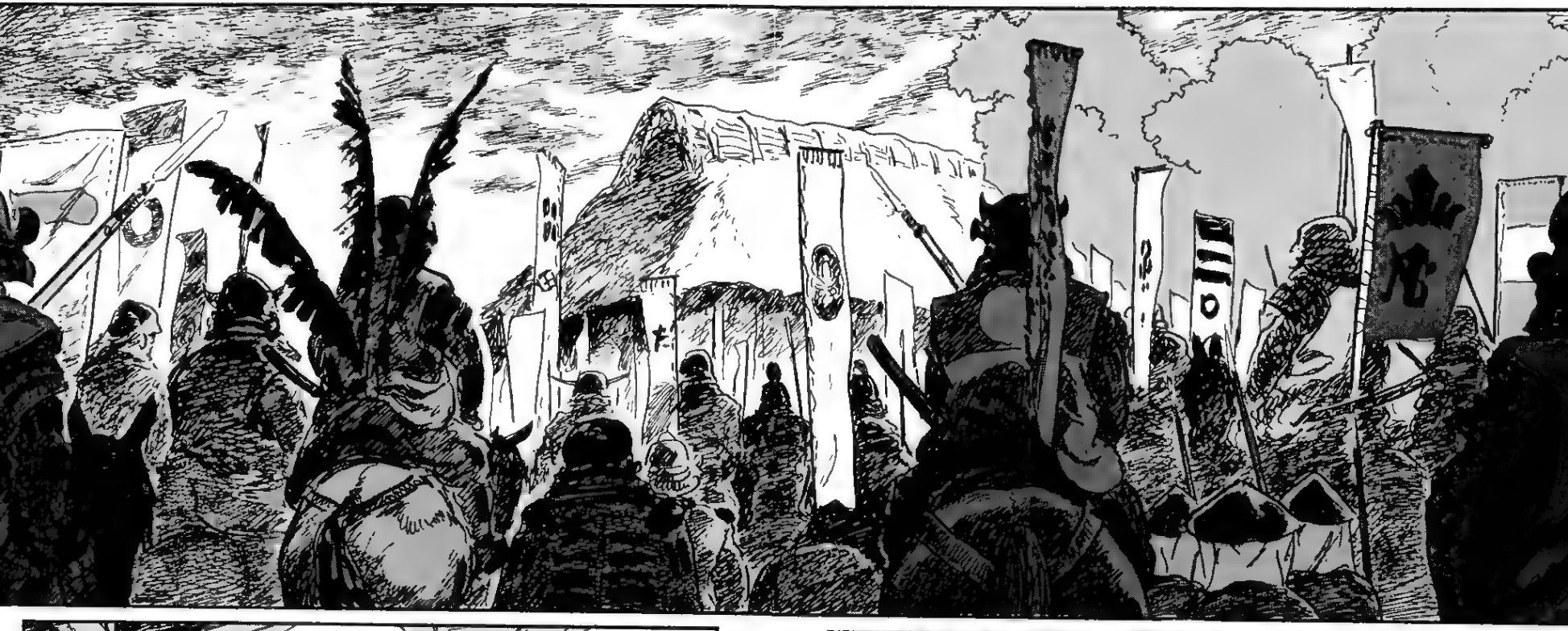
LOOKS LIKE WE'RE SURROUNDED.
OH NO! MINŌ SOLDIERS! THERE ARE AT LEAST TWO HUNDRED!
IT WAS HIDEYOSHI-*DONO* WHO DID IT.
TAKENAKA-*SAMA*, DID YOU SUMMON THEM?

"TAKENAKA HANBEI HARBORS REBELLIOUS DESIGNS. HE WILL BETRAY MINŌ AND JOIN HIDEYOSHI'S RANKS." THOSE ARE THE LIES THAT HIDEYOSHI-*DONO* MADE UP.
あ
AH
AND SO THAT IS HOW HIDEYOSHI-*DONO* PERSUADES ME.
HIDEYOSHI-*DONO* HAS RELEASED HIS SPIES IN MINŌ. THEY MUST HAVE SPREAD THE RUMORS LIKE WILDFIRE.

I BELIEVED THE MINŌ TROOPS WOULD NOT COME. NO MATTER HOW HIDEYOSHI-*DONO* FUELED HIS OWN RUMORS, I BELIEVED MY LORD WOULD NEVER DOUBT ME.
I...
I AM TAKENAKA HANBEI OF MINŌ!
AND EVEN IF MY LORD BELIEVED THE LIES, I WAS SURE THERE WOULD BE AT LEAST ONE OR TWO WHO'D DISSUADE HIM FROM IT-- FROM BEING SO AFRAID AND SENDING TROOPS!
I MAY BE ALONE IN THE WILDERNESS, BUT I AM STILL TAKENAKA HANBEI OF MINŌ!


YOU HAVE THE SPIRIT TO PROPEL YOU TO STAKE YOUR LIFE FOR A MAN YOU BELIEVE IN AND WILLINGLY SERVE.
WHEN YOU READ A COUNTRY'S FUTURE, THEY SAY ALL YOU NEED IS TO LOOK AT ITS YOUNG MEN. WHAT I THOUGHT UPON OBSERVING YOU IS...

THE MAJORITY OF THOSE SURROUNDING MY COTTAGE ARE ALMOST CERTAINLY YOUNG MEN.
NOW LET ME ASCERTAIN WHETHER THERE ARE ANY WHO POSSESS SUCH SPIRIT IN MIND!



TWO MEN FROM ODA OFTEN COME TO TAKENAKA HANBEI.
THE RUMORS THAT HIDEYOSHI-*DONO* STARTED MAY ALSO INCLUDE SOMETHING LIKE...

SO PLEASE DO NOT SHOW YOUR-SELVES.
NOW. LET ME BARE MYSELF TO THE WIND AND READ MINŌ'S FUTURE.

HERE IS WHAT I MUST SAY TO YOU, TAKENAKA HANBEI-DONO. WORD HAS IT YOU ARE CONSPIRING WITH ODA. FROM WHAT I HEAR THEIR SPIES CAME LAST NIGHT WITH A SECRET LETTER, WHICH PROVES THIS.

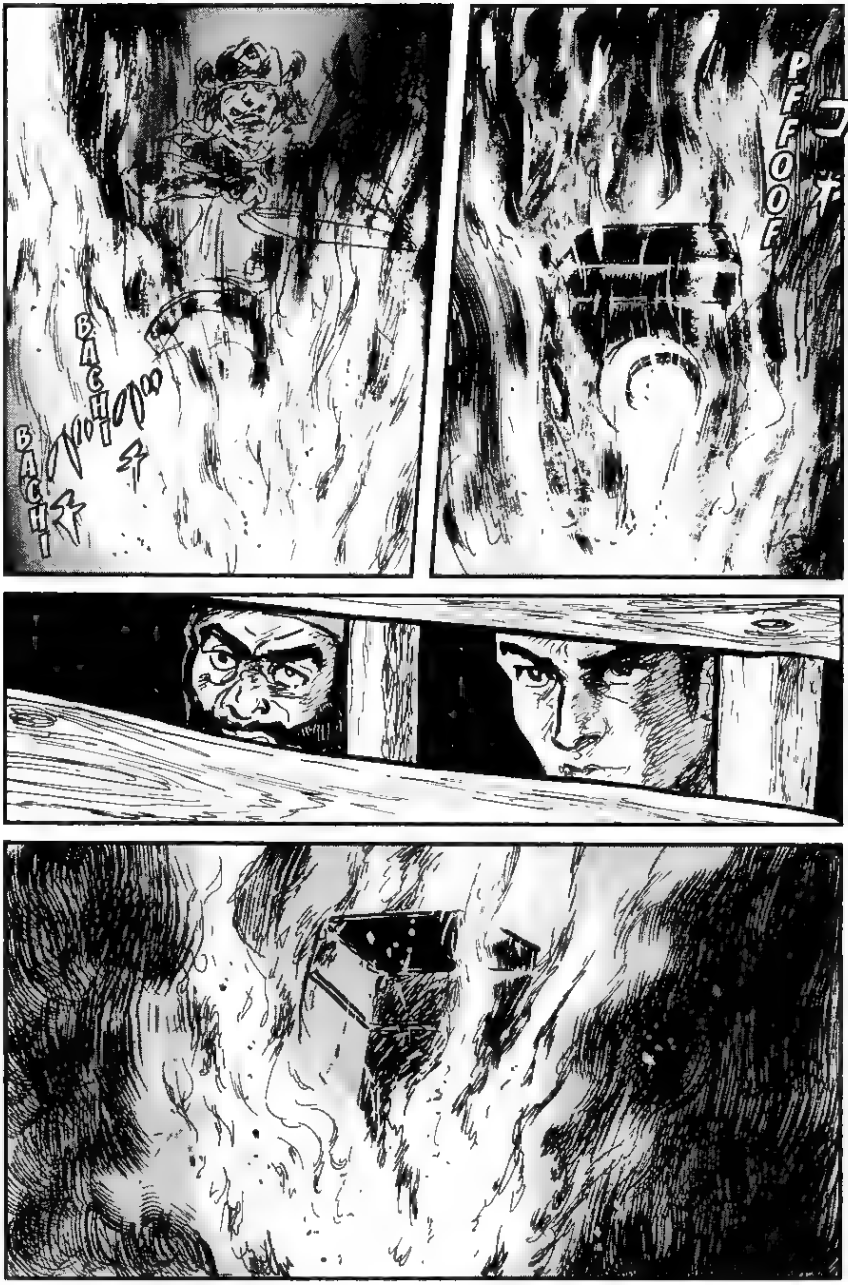
INDEED.
DID THE LORD ORDER IT?
WE MUST SEARCH YOUR COTTAGE NOW.
THERE'S NO ROOM FOR PERSONAL OPINION. I FOLLOW ORDERS. THAT'S ALL.
WHAT DO YOU THINK YOURSELF?
WHY DID YOU NOT STATE YOUR NAME? FURTHERMORE, ARE YOU UNAWARE OF THE CIVILITY OF DISMOUNTING BEFORE YOU SPEAK?
YOU ARE ASAHINA KOJIRŌ, I BELIEVE.

HA HA HA HA HA.
HA HA HA HA HA.
TAKENAKA-DONO, YOU'VE RETIRED INTO PRIVATE LIFE. NO CIVILITY IS CALLED FOR. BESIDES, IT'S WARTIME.
IF I AM STILL A VASSAL OF MINŌ, YOU MAY SHOUT THAT I AM CONSPIRING AND SUSPECT MY BETRAYAL.
BUT A MAN WHO'S RETIRED INTO PRIVATE LIFE IS A MAN WHO'S NO LONGER A VASSAL.
LET ME ASK. WHY DO YOU DENOUNCE A RETIRED MAN FOR BEING IN SECRET COMMUNICATION?
AND WHY DO YOU SURROUND HIM WITH AN ARMY?

WHEN I HAVE NO MASTER, WHOM DO I BETRAY AND HOW CAN I BE IN COLLUSION?!
EVEN THOUGH YOU'VE RETIRED, YOU'RE SOMEONE WE COULD NEVER IGNORE.
YOU STILL HAVE LASTING OBLIGATIONS. IN ADDITION, BEING A FORMER VASSAL, YOU ARE VERY FAMILIAR WITH EVERYTHING THAT GOES ON IN OUR LAND.
YOU THINK IT'S A PROBLEM IF I SECRETLY JOIN HANDS WITH ODA! BUT WHAT IF I'M INNOCENT? WHAT HAPPENS THEN?!
IN A NUTSHELL, YOU ARE AFRAID OF ME.
BUT IF I AM SOMEONE NOT TO BE IGNORED, WHY DON'T YOU SHOW DUE RESPECT?

THE WAY A YOUNGSTER LIKE YOU AND THE LORD ILL-TREAT ME! DON'T YOU REALIZE WHAT YOU'RE DOING IS DRIVING ME TO THINK I MIGHT AS WELL BETRAY YOU?!
RUMOR IS NOT TO BE BELIEVED BUT TO BE VERIFIED. BRINGING AN ARMY AND SHOWING NO CIVILITY. IT SHOWS YOUR BELIEF IN THE LIE.
BUT WHEN YOU DID, YOU SHOULD'VE BROUGHT JUST TWO OR THREE MEN, NOT AN ARMY.
DANCING TO THE RUMOR, YOU HAD TO COME HERE. THAT'S FINE.

HOW SAD. A MAN WHO LISTENS TO GOSSIP CANNOT RULE A COUNTRY, NOR CAN HE CAPTURE PEOPLE'S HEARTS.


BACHI
BACHI
PFOOE

TELL HIM THAT THE NAME TAKENAKA, THE CLAN THAT BELONGED TO THE WARRIOR CLASS, HAS TURNED TO ASHES.
GO BACK AND TELL THE LORD THAT HANBEI HAS BURNED HIS BATTLE SUIT...
I, TAKENAKA HANBEI, SHALL NEVER WEAR ARMOR AGAIN.
INDEED.
IF THERE WAS ANYONE WHO DIDN'T LOOK AWAY AFTER PUSHING HIM THAT FAR, THEY ARE NOT *SAMURAI*.
THEY'RE LEAVING.

WITHOUT SHACKLES AND WITHOUT FEAR, HANBEI WILL LIVE LIKE AN INFANT. PLEASE PASS THAT ALONG TO HIDEYOSHI-DONO.

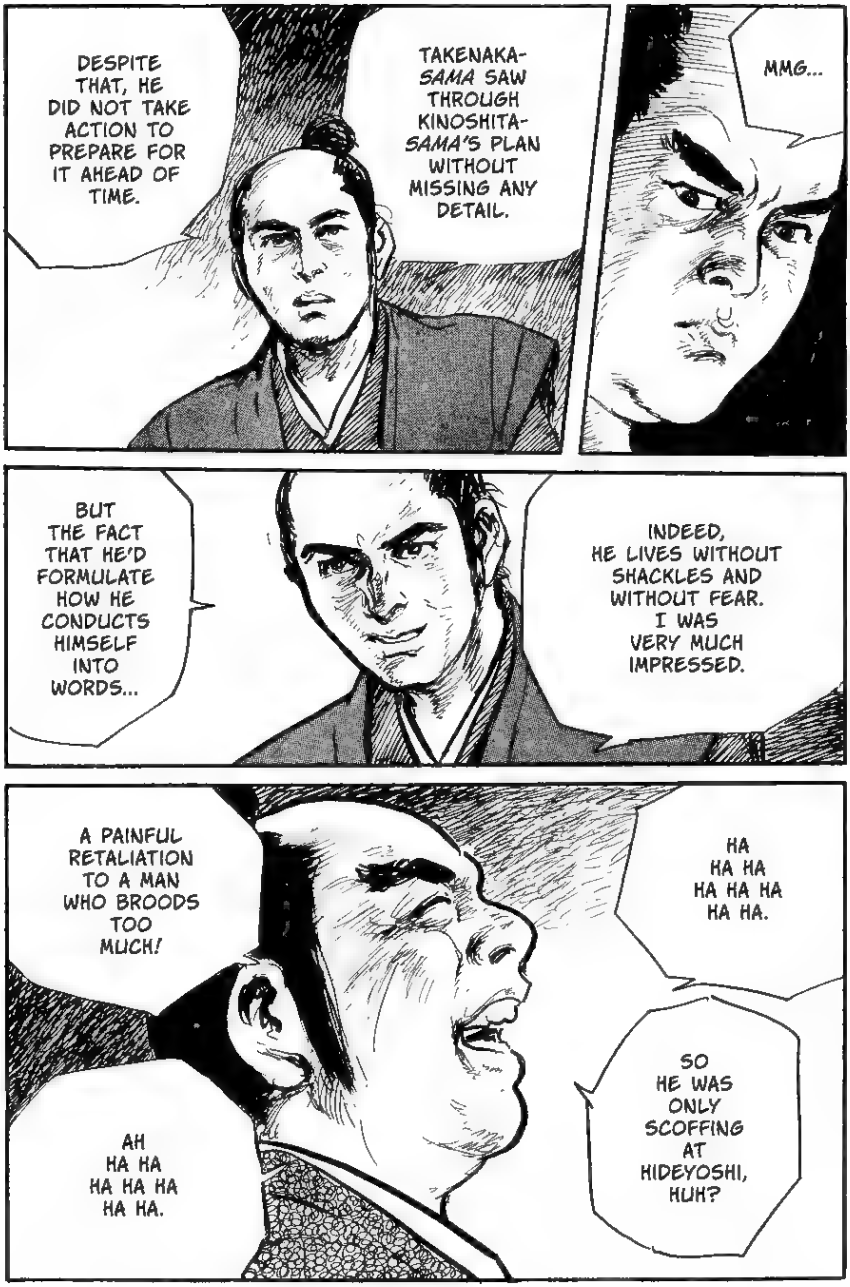
HE SAYS HE'LL LIVE WITHOUT SHACKLES OR FEAR?
FROM WHAT I HEAR, HE ALSO SAID HE'LL LIVE LIKE A NEWBORN BABY.
I BELIEVE HE MEANS TO LIVE TODAY THE BEST HE CAN WITHOUT BEING CHAINED TO THE PAST OR AFRAID OF THE FUTURE.
NOW, WHAT DOES THAT MEAN?

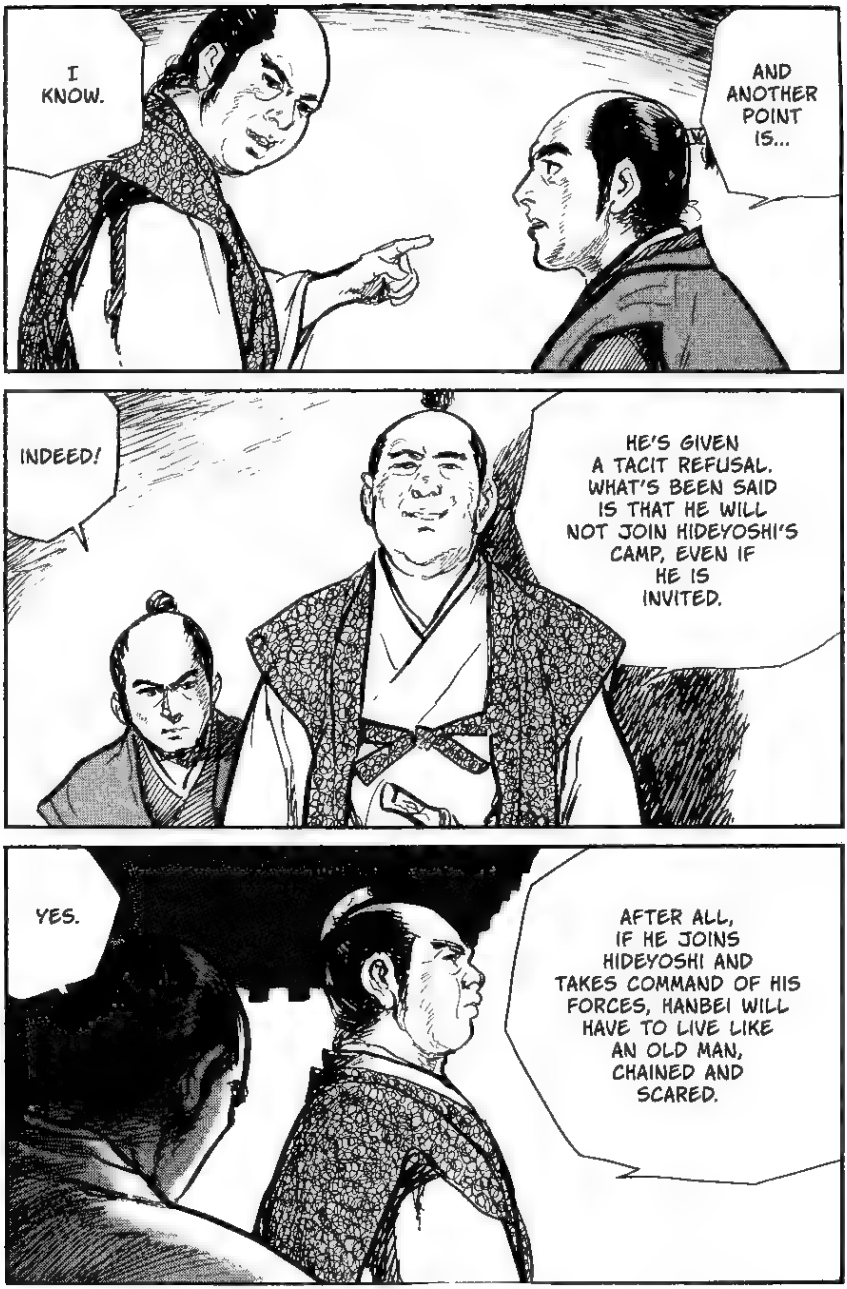
INDEED.
MEANING, HE WON'T BE HOSTILE BUT HE WON'T BE FRIENDLY EITHER.
MMM. HE'S SO DESPERATE TO LIVE HIS OWN LIFE THAT HE HAS NO ROOM TO GET INVOLVED WITH OTHERS.
PERSUADE HIM TO JOIN YOUR RANKS WHATEVER IT TAKES!
BALDY RAT!
YES SIR!!
NOT PROUD AND NOT HUMBLE. KNOWING HIS POSITION, HE KEEPS TO HIMSELF. MM... WHAT A TALENT TO BE WASTED.

YES.
SO HE WANTS TO LIVE WITHOUT SHACKLES AND WITHOUT FEAR...

I WONDER IF I'D BE ABLE TO SAY THE SAME, SIX YEARS FROM NOW.
TAKENAKA HANBEI IS SIX YEARS OLDER THAN I AM.
NO MATTER HOW MANY YEARS PASS... I IMAGINE I'LL NEVER BE ABLE TO SAY WHAT HE DID.
IN MY CASE, I AM SHACKLED AND I FEAR ALL THE TIME. I LIVE LIKE AN OLD MAN WITH A HUNDRED SUFFERINGS CARVED DEEP INTO HIS MIND...
...WHO ELSE COULD MAKE THE DECLARATION THAT HE DID?
OUR SITUATIONS MAY BE DIFFERENT, BUT IN THIS TIME OF WARRING STATES...
YOU ARE IN A DIFFERENT POSITION FROM TAKENAKA-*SAMA*.

HE ASSERTS THAT HE WANTS TO LIVE LIKE AN INFANT, THROWING AWAY HIS FAME AND FORTUNE--BUT THAT'S NOT SO EASY TO DO.
EVERY GENERAL VIES TO RULE THE NATION. THE AMBITION TO DISTINGUISH OURSELVES IS LIKE A TRAP AND MAKES US AFRAID OF EVERYONE, WHICH IN TURN MAKES US SCHEME AND PLOT.
I VIEW IT IN A SLIGHTLY DIFFERENT LIGHT.
IF ANYONE ELSE SAID IT, HE'D BE A LAUGHINGSTOCK. BUT COMING FROM TAKENAKA, IT SOUNDS CONCEIVABLE.
BUT BY EXPRESSING IT IN WORDS, HE WAS BEING SARCASTIC TO KINOSHITA-*SAMA*, I THINK.
TAKENAKA-*SAMA* DOES, INDEED, WISH TO LIVE THAT WAY.
HMPH. LIKE HOW?


DESPITE THAT, HE DID NOT TAKE ACTION TO PREPARE FOR IT AHEAD OF TIME.
TAKENAKA-SAMA SAW THROUGH KINOSHITA-SAMA'S PLAN WITHOUT MISSING ANY DETAIL.
MMG...
BUT THE FACT THAT HE'D FORMULATE HOW HE CONDUCTS HIMSELF INTO WORDS...
INDEED, HE LIVES WITHOUT SHACKLES AND WITHOUT FEAR. I WAS VERY MUCH IMPRESSED.
A PAINFUL RETALIATION TO A MAN WHO BROODS TOO MUCH!
HA HA HA HA HA HA HA.
SO HE WAS ONLY SCOFFING AT HIDEYOSHI, HUH?
AH HA HA HA HA HA HA.

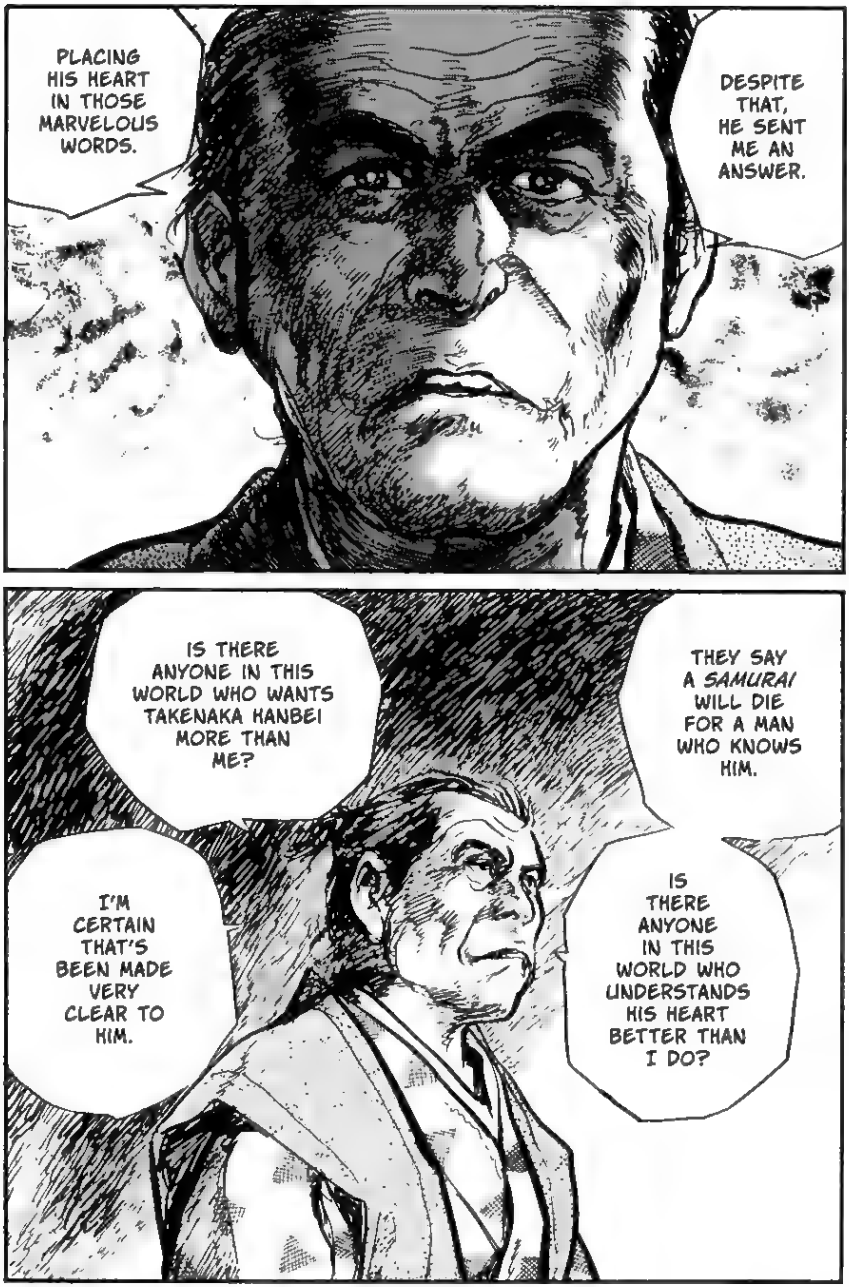

I KNOW.
AND ANOTHER POINT IS...
INDEED!
HE'S GIVEN A TACIT REFUSAL. WHAT'S BEEN SAID IS THAT HE WILL NOT JOIN HIDEYOSHI'S CAMP, EVEN IF HE IS INVITED.
YES.
AFTER ALL, IF HE JOINS HIDEYOSHI AND TAKES COMMAND OF HIS FORCES, HANBEI WILL HAVE TO LIVE LIKE AN OLD MAN, CHAINED AND SCARED.

WITHOUT SHACKLES AND WITHOUT FEAR. IN THOSE WORDS, HE CONVEYED MANY LAYERS OF MEANING AND ALSO MADE HIMSELF STAND OUT BOLD AND CLEAR.
HE IS A REMARK-ABLE MAN, INDEED.
MINŌ IS DOOMED.
WHAT IF HE TURNED ON US? A CHILL RAN DOWN MY SPINE WHEN I THOUGHT OF IT.
INDEED.
THEY COULDN'T EVEN MANAGE TO WORK WITH A MAN OF HIS CALIBER!

HA
HA HA
HA HA HA
HA HA.
ハーハーハーハーハーハーハーハーハーハー

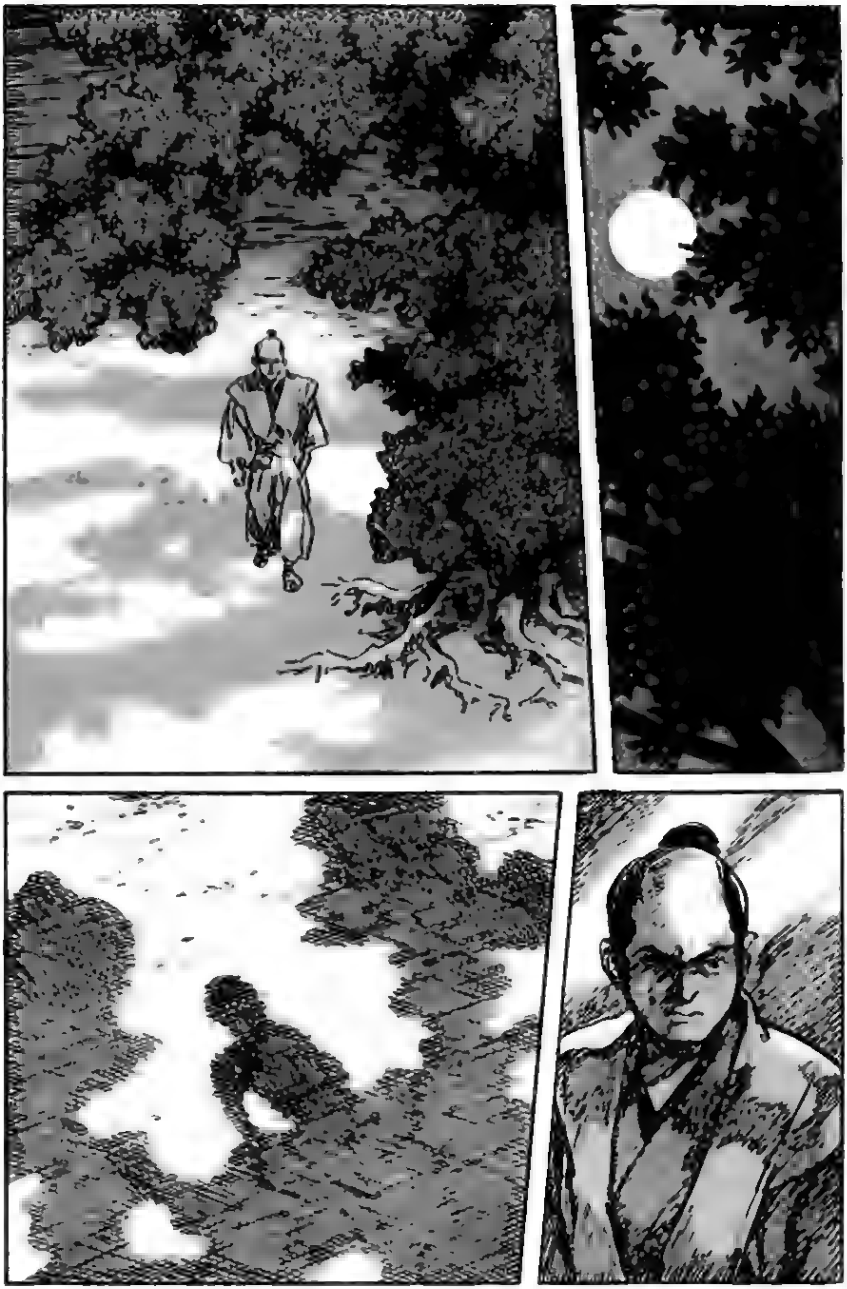
SO HE KNEW EVERY CARD I HAD IN HAND?
OH, HE GOT ME, ALL RIGHT! GOT ME GOOD!
NOT ONLY THAT, BY SAYING WITHOUT SHACKLES AND WITHOUT FEAR, HE INDIRECTLY REJECTED ME.
THAT'S JUST WHAT I'D EXPECT FROM TAKENAKA HANBEI SHIGEHARU. FEARSOME!
WHAT WILL YOU DO NOW? IT'S NO TIME TO BE LAUGHING, I WOULD THINK...
HEH HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA.
AH HA HA HA HA.

I MIGHT HAVE SET HIM UP, BUT I HAVEN'T ASKED YET.
WHAT?
IT'S NOT HOPE-LESS.
I NEVER SAID A WORD ABOUT WANTING HIM TO JOIN MY RANKS!
BUT OFFICIALLY, I'VE NEVER MET TAKENAKA NOR HAVE I OFFERED HIM A POSITION.
SURE, I CONCENTRATED EVERY ASPECT OF ALL MY PLANS ON TAKENAKA.
I EVEN DRAGGED IEYASU-*DONO* INTO IT.


PLACING HIS HEART IN THOSE MARVELOUS WORDS.
DESPITE THAT, HE SENT ME AN ANSWER.
IS THERE ANYONE IN THIS WORLD WHO WANTS TAKENAKA HANBEI MORE THAN ME?
THEY SAY A *SAMURAI* WILL DIE FOR A MAN WHO KNOWS HIM.
I'M CERTAIN THAT'S BEEN MADE VERY CLEAR TO HIM.
IS THERE ANYONE IN THIS WORLD WHO UNDERSTANDS HIS HEART BETTER THAN I DO?

HE HAS TO FEEL GOOD ABOUT IT.
AND THAT'S WHY HE TURNED ME DOWN.
I USED BOTH NOBUNAGA-*SAMA* AND IEYASU-*DONO*. I PLOTTED SOMETHING AS BIG AS THAT. THE SHEER SCALE OF IT SHOWS JUST HOW ENTHUSIASTIC I AM.
THAT MUST HAVE MADE HIM FEEL GOOD. KNOWING I REGARD HIM SO HIGHLY EVEN THOUGH HE'S RETIRED.
I CAN GET TAKENAKA HANBEI!!
IT'S NOT HOPELESS YET!
THE FACT THAT HE DECLINED SHOWS HOW PLEASED HE IS. NOTHING ELSE.
THAT'S WHY...

WHAT?
PEASANTS ARE STRONG.
A COUNTRY MAY PERISH BUT THE LAND WILL NOT DISAPPEAR. NOR DO THE PEASANTS WHO CLING TO THE EARTH ITSELF.
PEASANTS ARE THE ONES WHO SURVIVE IN THE END!
THOSE WHO PLOW THE LAND AND PRODUCE WHAT THEY NEED THEMSELVES ARE, I THINK, THE TOUGHEST.
EVEN-TUALLY, TAKENAKA WILL BE TAKEN.
HIDEYOSHI ROSE FROM SUCH PEASANTRY.

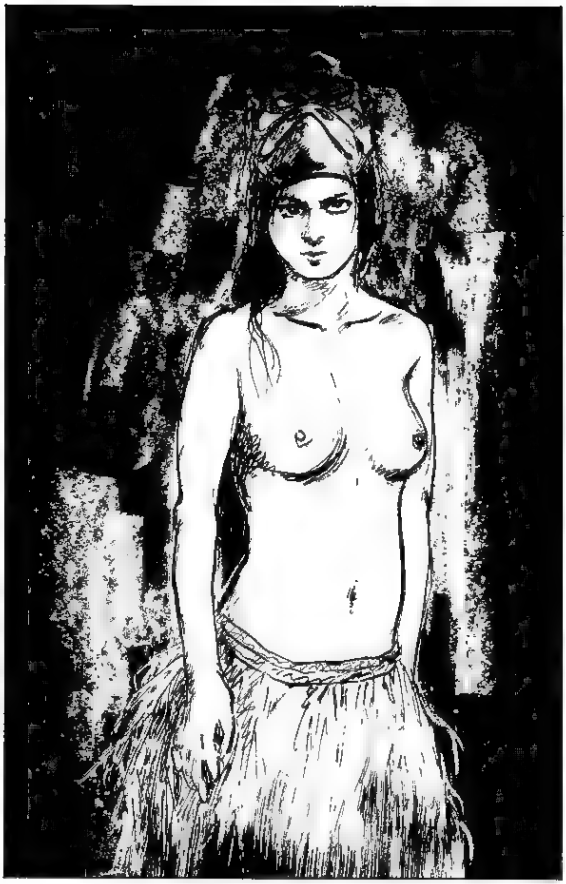


KIKKO!

I'M PREGNANT.

Chapter On Haja Kensho

No. 1: Ihozo Kikko (Part 1)

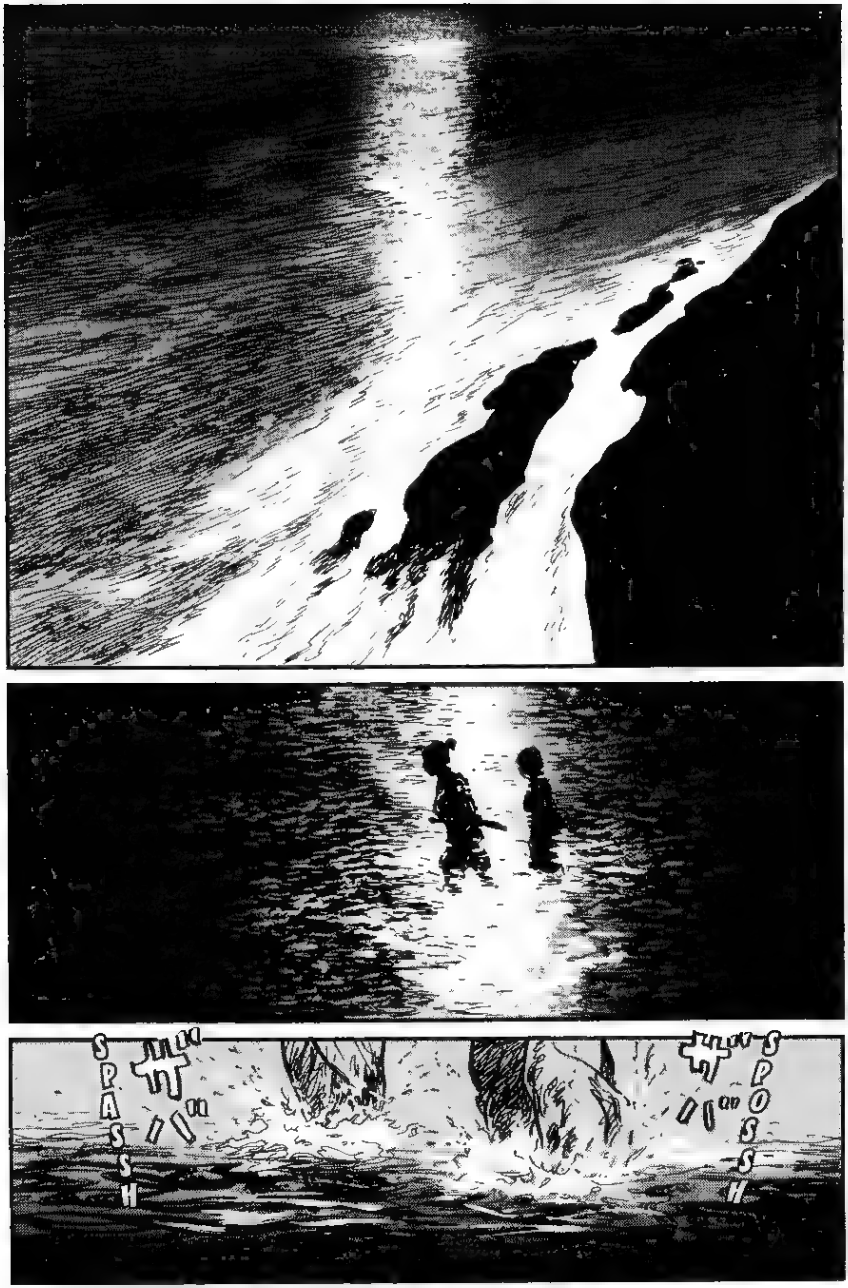


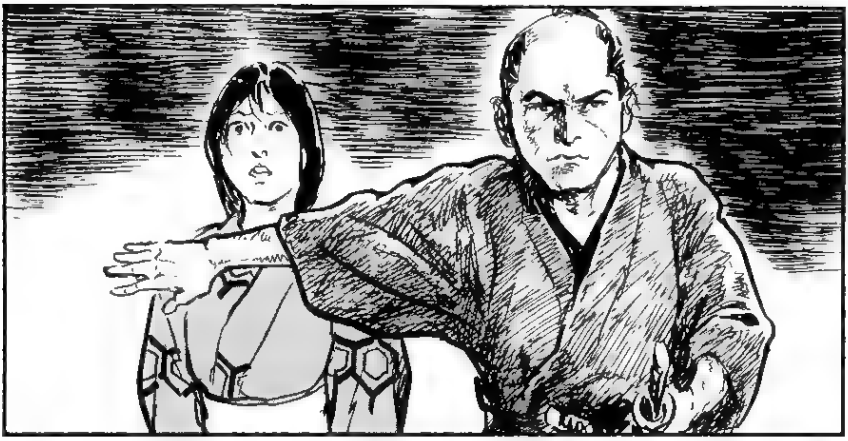
YOU HAVE A BABY!
I WANT YOU...
WITH YOU? WHERE ?!
WILL YOU COME WITH ME, HANZŌ?
...TO ANNOUNCE THAT YOU ARE THE FATHER TO THE PEOPLE OF IHORO!

REALLY?
AND WHERE ARE THEY?
OTHERWISE THEY MAY THINK I WAS IMPREGNATED BY SOME UNKNOWN THUG.
I'M SO GLAD!
OF COURSE.
THEN YOU'LL COME WITH ME?
YUP!
GOT IT. WE SHOULD MAKE IT THERE BY MID-NIGHT!
THEY'VE COME ALL THE WAY UP TO GŌDO, JUST WEST OF THE NAGARA RIVER.

ARE YOU OKAY?

IN A LITTLE WHILE I WON'T BE ABLE TO RUN ANY MORE, BUT I'M FINE FOR NOW.


SPASSH
SPOSSH

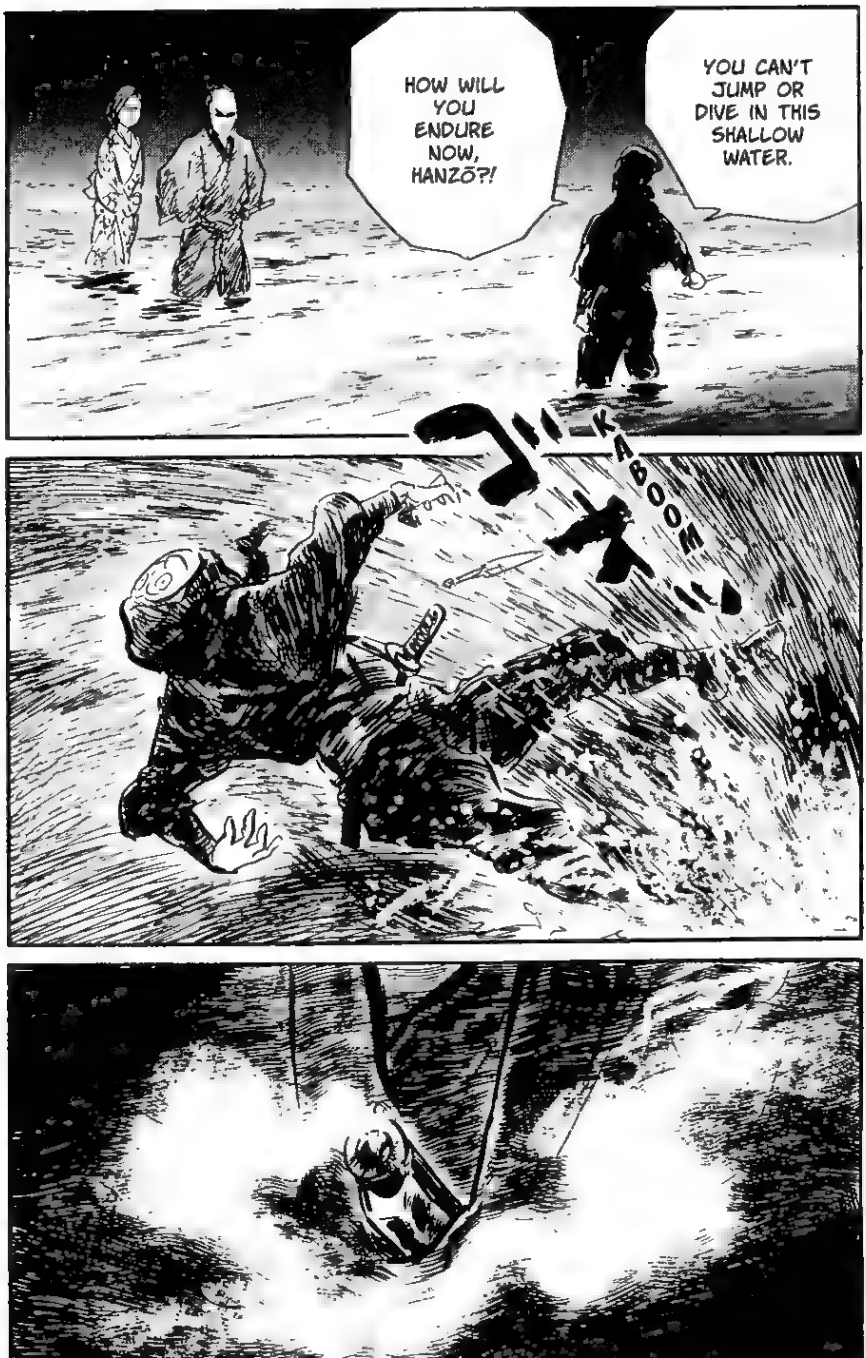


TŌMA
ENŌ!

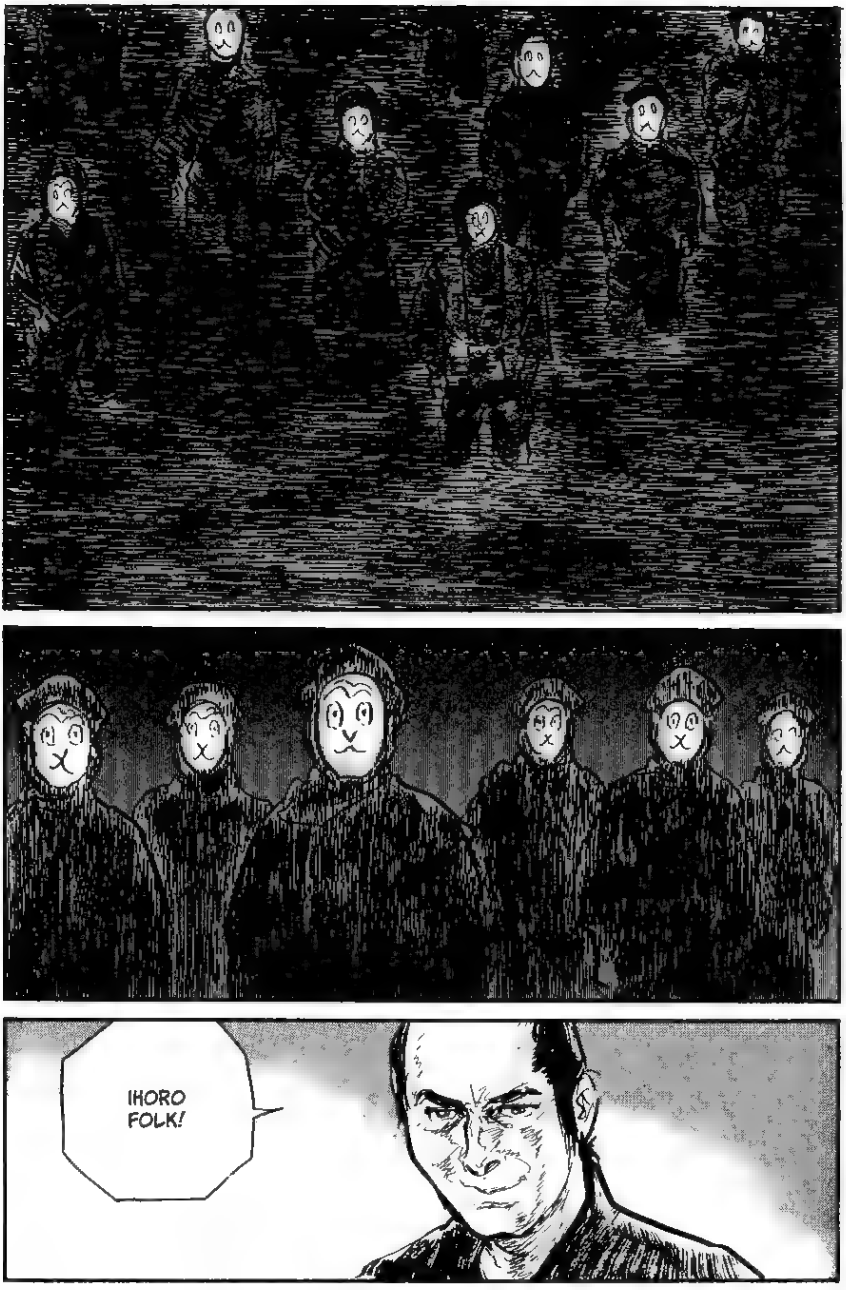
A LAW THAT BANS FEMALE YAMABUSERI FROM HAVING THE CHILDREN OF FLATLAND-ERS.
THERE IS A LAW FOR YAMA-BUSERI.

SHE WILL DIE AFTER I FINISH YOU.
KIKKŌ BROKE THAT LAW!!
P... PLEASE BEAT HIM!
AND THAT LAW SHALL BE NO MORE!
HANZŌ!! IF YOU DEFEAT ENŌ OF TŌMA, WE CAN PROVE BEYOND ANY DOUBT THAT YOU, THE BEST OF IGA, ARE THE BABY'S FATHER.

...I AM THE FATHER!
SO THIS IS WHAT IT MEANS TO ANNOUNCE...
ONLY BY DEMONSTRATING IT HERE AND NOW CAN YOU MAKE THE OTHERS BELIEVE!
SAY WHAT YOU WANT, IT DOESN'T PROVE ANYTHING!
IT'S OVER.
WITH ME AS YOUR OPPONENT... HEH HEH HEH.


HOW WILL YOU ENDURE NOW, HANZŌ?!
YOU CAN'T JUMP OR DIVE IN THIS SHALLOW WATER.
KABOOM

SWAHHH
SPOORSH
IT'S NOT LIKE IT USED TO BE.
IN THE EVER-CHANGING FLOW OF TIME, TO TRY TO COMPARE TWO *SUPPA* IS SOMETHING AS EPHEMERAL AS A BUBBLE IN THE STREAM.


IHORO FOLK!

I MAY HAVE SLEPT WITH KIKKŌ AND MADE A CHILD, BUT I DO NOT WANT ANYTHING TO DO WITH YOU.
I AM HATTORI HANZŌ MASANARI.
WHAT DID YOU EXPECT TO PROVE BY PLACING ME FACE TO FACE WITH TŌMA ENŌ?!
NOT EVEN A BEAST WOULD LURE THE FATHER OF AN UNBORN BABY INTO THE JAWS OF DEATH.

YOU, WHO SET IT UP, AND KIKKŌ, WHO ACCEPTED IT. I DON'T FEEL ANY KIND OF LOVE HERE, NOT HUMAN LOVE! NOT WOMAN LOVE!
I DO NOT WANT MY CHILD RAISED BY ANYONE WHO HAS NO RIGHT TO BE A HUMAN OR A WOMAN.
ONCE BORN, I WILL ADOPT THE BABY.
I'LL RETURN WHEN THE BABY IS DUE.

I WILL SEE YOU AGAIN. JUST ONCE AGAIN.

HO... HOLD IT!!
SPASSH
SPOSSH
I SAW YOU TAKE IT FROM A MAN FROM ODA!!
I KNEW YOU HAD A PISTOL!!
PLEASE WAIT!!
NOOO!
I'VE BEEN SHADOWING YOU FOR A LONG TIME!

WAHHHH
BASHA
BASHA
BASHA
OH, IF THAT'S THE CASE...
FINE.

THAT DOESN'T MATTER.
WAS IT UNACCEPTABLE THAT I SHOT HIM?
YOU'VE LEFT A ROOT OF EVIL.
IT'S UNSPEAKABLY RUDE.
THEN WHY DO YOU STILL WEAR YOUR MASKS?
BUT INSTEAD OF SHOOTING HIM DEAD, YOU ONLY WOUNDED HIM!! NOT ONLY THAT, YOU CRIPPLED HIS RIGHT ARM.
KILL HIM OR LEAVE HIM ALIVE, EITHER WAY YOU SHOULD'VE MADE A CLEAR-CUT CHOICE.

YOU'VE HUMILIATED HIM BEYOND DEATH. FROM NOW ON AND AS LONG AS HE LIVES, ENŌ WILL COME AFTER YOU, KIKKŌ, AND THE UNBORN CHILD.
IT CAN'T BE HELPED NOW.
THAT IS WHAT'S EVIL.
HM?!
WELL...IT'S ALSO TRUE, WE SAW WHAT'S GOOD IN YOU IN WHAT YOU DID.

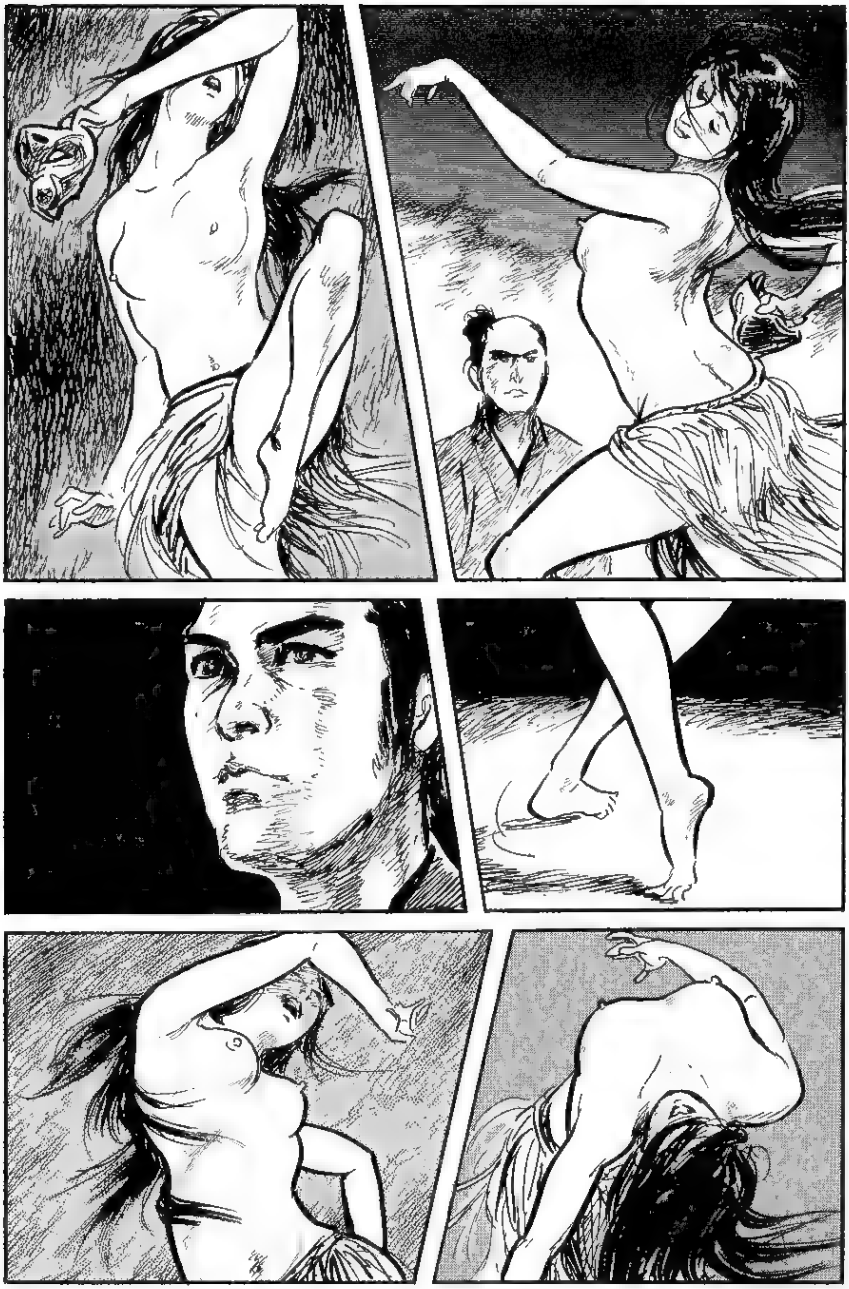
IF YOU WERE AN ORDINARY *SAMURAI*, YOU WOULD NOT HAVE SPARED ENŌ. YOU WOULD'VE KILLED HIM.
BUT BECAUSE YOU ARE *SUPPA*, YOU DIDN'T SHOOT HIM DEAD. THAT MEANS YOU HAVEN'T LOST A *SUPPA'S* HEART EVEN THOUGH YOU'VE BECOME TOKUGAWA *SAMURAI*.
YOU HESITATED BETWEEN SHOOTING HIM OR USING YOUR OWN SKILL TO BEAT HIM.
THAT'S WHY YOU STOPPED AFTER YOU HURT HIM. THAT IS HOW WE UNDERSTOOD IT.
AS FAR AS TŌMA ENŌ IS CONCERNED, WE WERE NOT INVOLVED WITH WHAT HE DID.
HE SIMPLY SPRANG OUT, ON HIS OWN AND WITHOUT OUR PERMISSION.
AND KIKKŌ MISTOOK WHAT HAPPENED!

WE NEVER THOUGHT OF ATTACKING THE FATHER OF HER BABY.
THAT'S WHY WE GRANTED KIKKŌ PERMISSION TO APPROACH YOU.
IT'S TRUE, WE HAVE THAT LAW. BUT WE'VE NEVER CONSIDERED YOU, HANZŌ-*DONO*, AS A FLATLANDER. WE THINK OF YOU AS *YAMABUSERI* LIKE US.
YOU MUST MAKE LOVE TO KIKKŌ AS WE WATCH.
AFFIRM OUR TIES?
WE HAVEN'T TAKEN OFF OUR MASKS BECAUSE WE HAVEN'T FINISHED THE RITUAL TO AFFIRM OUR TIES.

THAT'S HOW YOU PROVE YOU ARE THE FATHER!
B...BUT...
JUST THINK OF US AS THE GRASS AND TREES.
IF WE REMOVE OUR MASKS, YOU MAY FEEL UNCOMFORTABLE.
WHA...
ONCE OUR TIES ARE AFFIRMED, WE'LL GIVE YOU INABAYAMA.

"AS IF THERE IS NO IMPEDIMENT TO BEING IN MIDAIR." IT SAYS THE *FŪ* IS EVERY ASPECT OF THE SKY. AND THE *MA* IS FROM THE *SUKHAVIHARA* (PEACEFUL PRACTICES), THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER OF LOTUS SUTRA. "ERADICATING THREE POISONS, LEAPING BEYOND THREE REALMS, AND BREAKING THROUGH THE NETS OF THE DEMONS." THE *MA* IS FROM THE LAW OF THE ARMY OF WORTHIES AND SAGES.
WE, IHORO, ARE ALSO CALLED *FŪMA*. THE *FŪ* OF *FŪMA* IS FROM THE SECRET TEACHING OF *DHARANI* OF ESOTERIC BUDDHISM.
OUR FOUNDER WAS KOJIRŌ OF IHORO. FROM THE TIME THAT TAIRA NO MASAKADO WAS KILLED IN THE THIRD YEAR OF TENGYŌ (940 A.D.) UNTIL TODAY, WE'VE BEEN IN CONTROL OF THE GREAT MOUNTAINS OF GYŌJAYAMA.
AKIHA, KATSURAGI, SHIRAMINE, KŌRA, ZŌZU, KASAGI, MYŌKŌ, ONTAKE, ASAMA, HANDŌ, CHIHAYA, AKASAKA.
KIRA, KURAMA, KIEI, FUJI, HAGURO, MYŌGI, TSUKUBA, HIKO, TATE, ŌMINE, NACHI, KŌYA, NIITA, Ō, ISHIZUCHI, NYOI, SHIRAGA.

GYŌJA, SEPPIKO, SUGA, ŌE, MINOO, AND TSURUGISAN.
IF YOU DO ODA A FAVOR NOW, THE FOUNDATION OF TOKUGAWA WILL BECOME AS SOLID AS BEDROCK!
INABAYAMA IS IN THE PALM OF OUR HAND. HOW COULD WE NOT KNOW ITS HIDDEN WAYS AND BACK PATHS?



AHAHH!
AHAHH!
ZZZZZ

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THUK
THUK

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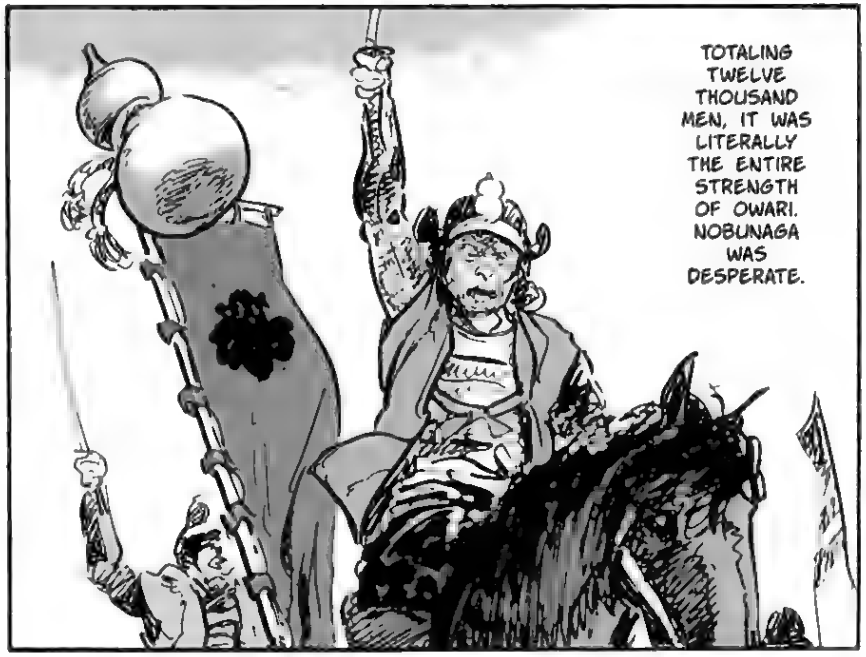
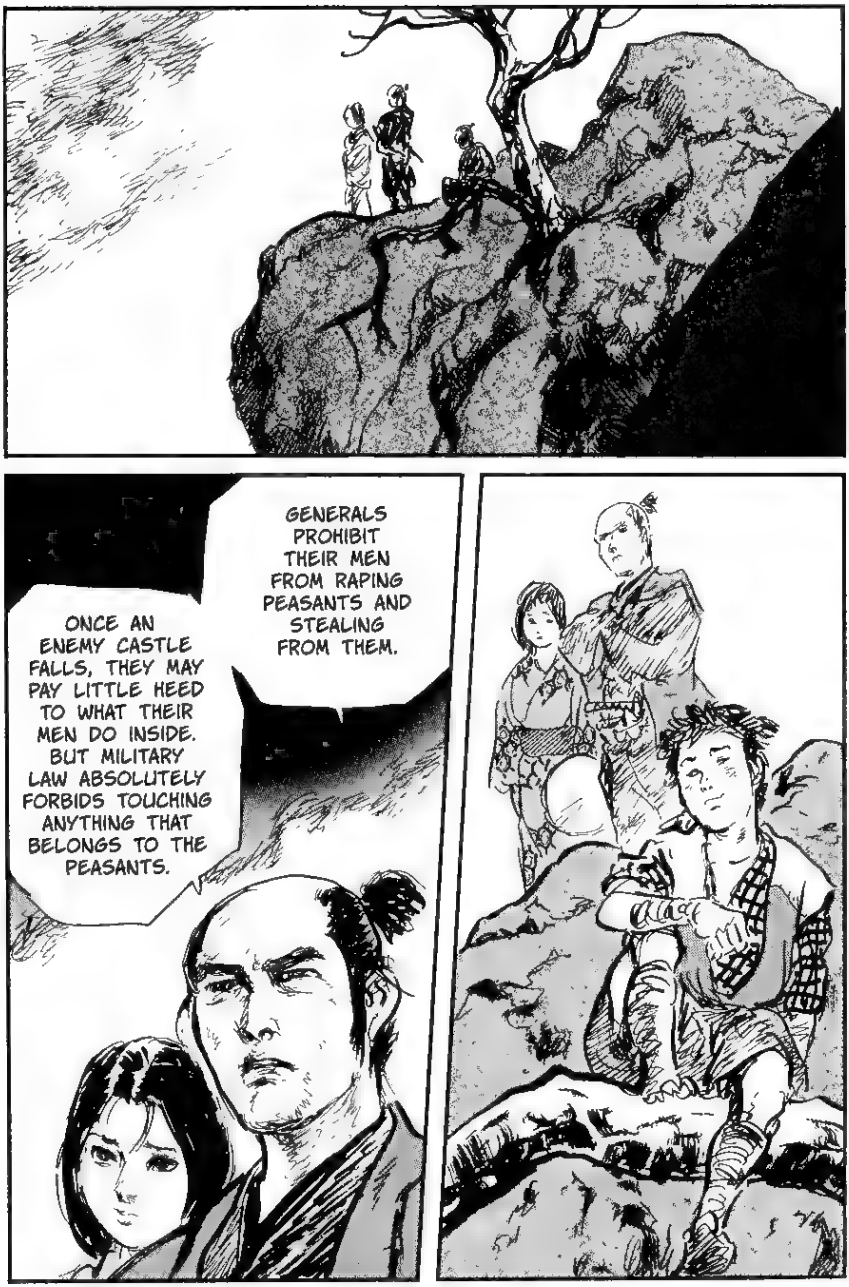
USING PINCER MOVEMENTS, ODA FORCES ATTACKED THE PLAINS OF ATSUMI AND KANŌ IN THE SOUTH, AND GŌTO AND KAGAMIJIMA IN THE WEST...
ADVANCING WITH EVER-INCREASING POWER.
COVERING THE WIDE RANGE OF THE NAGARA RIVER BASIN...

AFTER THAT CAME NOBUNAGA'S MAIN ARMY OF THREE THOUSAND, AND FOLLOWING THEM CAME SAKUMA'S TWO THOUSAND, WHO BROUGHT UP THE REAR.
FOLLOWING WERE THREE THOUSAND LED BY SHIBATA AND MORI. NEXT CAME TWO THOUSAND LED BY IKEDA, SASSA, AND MAEDA.
THE ADVANCE GROUP WAS ASSIGNED TO KINOSHITA WITH TWO THOUSAND MEN.


TOTALING TWELVE THOUSAND MEN, IT WAS LITERALLY THE ENTIRE STRENGTH OF OWARI. NOBUNAGA WAS DESPERATE.


GENERALS PROHIBIT THEIR MEN FROM RAPING PEASANTS AND STEALING FROM THEM.
ONCE AN ENEMY CASTLE FALLS, THEY MAY PAY LITTLE HEED TO WHAT THEIR MEN DO INSIDE. BUT MILITARY LAW ABSOLUTELY FORBIDS TOUCHING ANYTHING THAT BELONGS TO THE PEASANTS.

BECAUSE OF THE GREED, THERE IS DEATH, AND BECAUSE OF DEATH, THERE IS GREED.
IT'S GREED IN THE FACE OF DEATH! WITHOUT THIS GREED, IT'S IMPOSSIBLE TO WALK INTO BATTLE. SUCH IS HUMAN NATURE.
DESPITE THIS, INVADING SOLDIERS RAPE AND STEAL INDISCRIMINATELY.
IS THERE ANY DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THEIR GREED AND THAT OF THEIR MEN?
THE GENERALS ARE GREEDY IN THE FIRST PLACE. THAT'S WHY THEY INVADE A NEIGHBOR'S TERRITORY. BECAUSE THEY WANT TO STEAL, THEY START A WAR.
WAR IS VAIN AND SAD.

OKAY.
LET'S GET GOING NOW!

MOSUKE! HOLD YOUR TONGUE!
I GUESS SHE IS A WOMAN AFTER ALL.
I'VE NEVER SEEN MY SISTER ON SOME-ONE'S BACK BEFORE.
YAHHHH
TRUM-
TRUM-
TRUM
TRUM

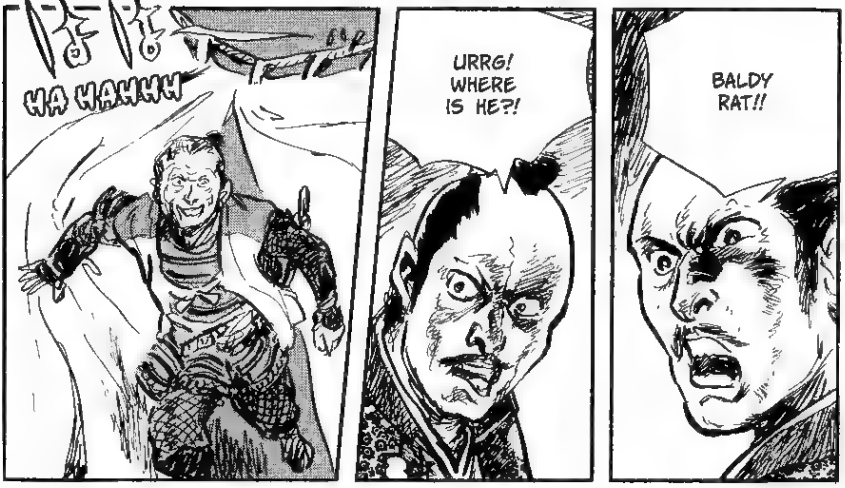
BAM
BAM
BAM
BAM
DO
DO
DO
DO
DOKKYYYN
ヒューン

YAHHH!
YAHHHH!

AS FAR AS THIS!
WE'VE COME THIS FAR!!

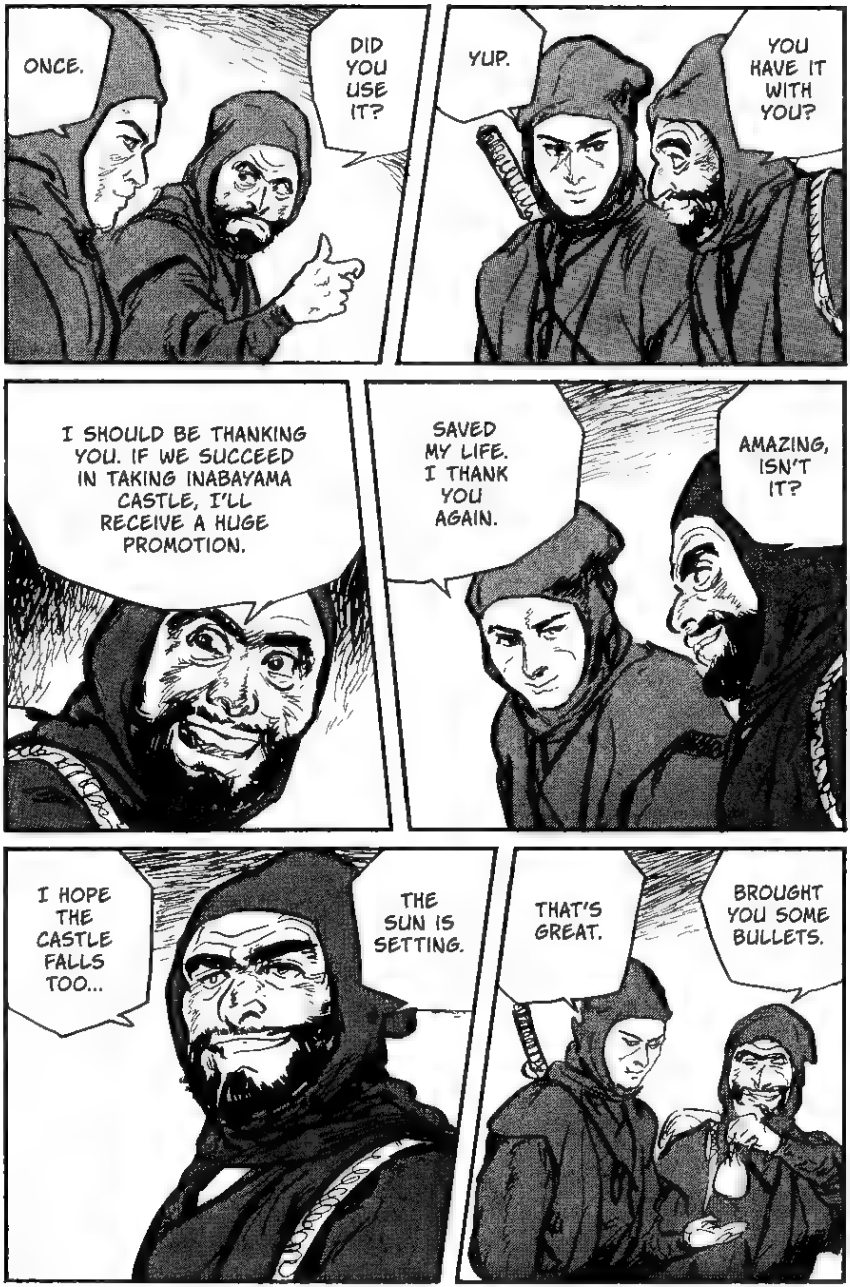
WE CAN'T!!
AND YET!
ALL THAT'S LEFT IS TO BREAK INTO THE MOUNTAIN CASTLE!

STILL, IF WE FAIL TO BREAK THROUGH AND EVENTUALLY PULL BACK, OWARI HAS NO FUTURE!!
THE MEN ARE EXHAUST-ED!


HA HAHAH
URRG! WHERE IS HE?!
BALDY RAT!!

HATTORI HANZŌ-DONO, THE VASSAL OF IEYASU-SAMA, USED HIS INFLUENCE TO MAKE THE SUPPA OF FŪMA HELP US!
I WILL LEAD MY MEN TO THE TOP OF INABAYAMA NOW!
AND WE WILL STRIKE THE MINŌ FORCES FROM ABOVE. MILORD, ONCE WE LIGHT THE SIGNAL FIRE, PLEASE LAUNCH AN ALL-OUT ATTACK!
THERE IS A HIDDEN PATH LEADING TO THE TOP OF INABAYAMA!
AS ALWAYS, YOU CERTAINLY ARE FRIENDLY WITH...
...IEYASU.
AS ALWAYS.

Hoooo
Whoooo


ONCE.
DID YOU USE IT?
YUP.
YOU HAVE IT WITH YOU?
I SHOULD BE THANKING YOU. IF WE SUCCEED IN TAKING INABAYAMA CASTLE, I'LL RECEIVE A HUGE PROMOTION.
SAVED MY LIFE. I THANK YOU AGAIN.
AMAZING, ISN'T IT?
I HOPE THE CASTLE FALLS TOO...
THE SUN IS SETTING.
THAT'S GREAT.
BROUGHT YOU SOME BULLETS.

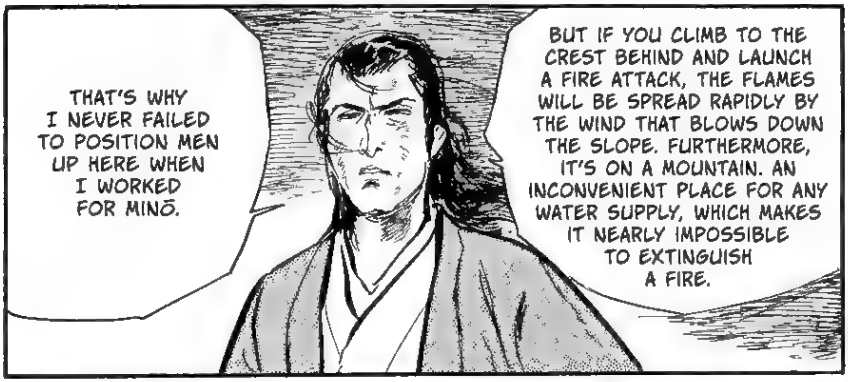
RIGHT IN HERE.
AND THE POW-DER?
YES! READY!
ARE THE TOWELS SOAKED IN OIL?
WE'VE ACCOMPLISHED A LOT TOGETHER, AND MOVING FORWARD WE'LL DO EVEN MORE TOGETHER.
I HAVE NOTHING SPECIAL TO SAY TO YOU.
GOOD.

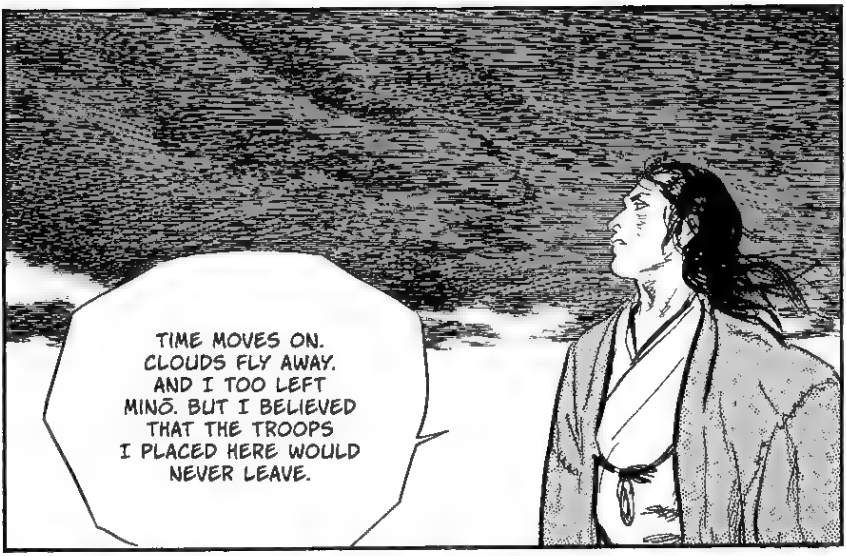
WHEN WE GO TO HELL, AT THE END OF THIS LIFE, IF WE CAN FEEL CONTENT, I SAY WE ARE LUCKY MEN.
WHATEVER THE RESULT, SO LONG AS WE PUT OUR BEST EFFORT INTO EVERYTHING WE DO, AT THE VERY LEAST WE'LL BE SATISFIED.
LET'S REMEMBER THAT THE REST OF OUR LIVES.
IF HATTORI HANZŌ-*DONO* HADN'T GIVEN US HIS HELP, WE MIGHT HAVE DIED WITH REGRETS, NEVER GAINING THIS SENSE OF GRATIFICATION.

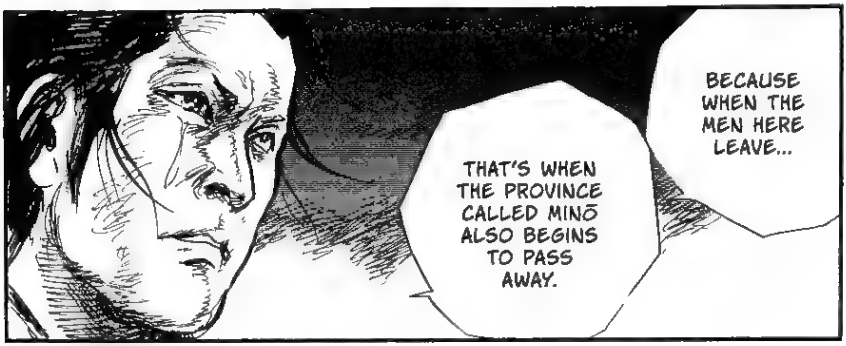
EVERYONE, PLEASE RUB PINE RESIN ON YOUR PALMS!
IT'S PINE RESIN.
HOW COME YOU'RE STICKY?
SOME-ONE'S UP THERE!

WHOOOOO

YOU ARE TAKENAKA KANBEI-DONO?
TA... TAKENAKA-SAMA!
WHAT WILL YOU DO WITH ME NOW?
YOU ARE KINOSHITA HIDEYOSHI-DONO?
INABAYAMA CASTLE IS IMPREGNABLE IF YOU ATTACK IT FROM THE FRONT.
ONLY DOING MY ROUTINE DUTY.
WHY ARE YOU HERE OF ALL PLACES?


THAT'S WHY I NEVER FAILED TO POSITION MEN UP HERE WHEN I WORKED FOR MINŌ.
BUT IF YOU CLIMB TO THE CREST BEHIND AND LAUNCH A FIRE ATTACK, THE FLAMES WILL BE SPREAD RAPIDLY BY THE WIND THAT BLOWS DOWN THE SLOPE. FURTHERMORE, IT'S ON A MOUNTAIN. AN INCONVENIENT PLACE FOR ANY WATER SUPPLY, WHICH MAKES IT NEARLY IMPOSSIBLE TO EXTINGUISH A FIRE.


TIME MOVES ON. CLOUDS FLY AWAY. AND I TOO LEFT MINŌ. BUT I BELIEVED THAT THE TROOPS I PLACED HERE WOULD NEVER LEAVE.

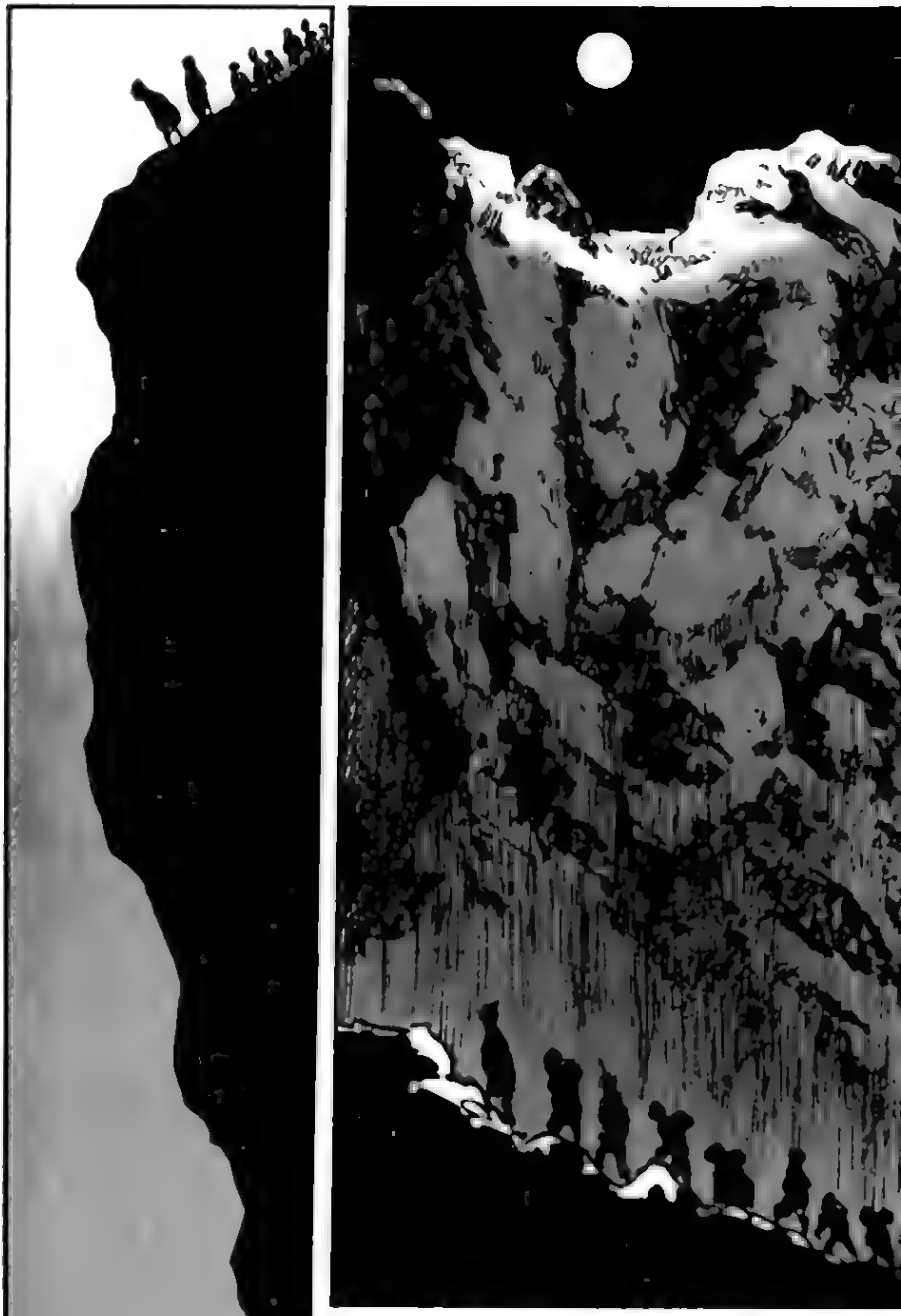

BECAUSE WHEN THE MEN HERE LEAVE...
THAT'S WHEN THE PROVINCE CALLED MINŌ ALSO BEGINS TO PASS AWAY.

WHAT'S WORSE, I FIND YOU HERE TOO.
I ONLY CAME TO LISTEN TO THE WIND BLOWING THROUGH THE PINE TREES.
THE DEEPEST PAIN OF A BROKEN HEART. THAT IS EXACTLY WHAT IT FEELS LIKE.

IF I MAKE ONE SPARK, THE WIND WILL CREATE A HUGE BLAZE.
EVEN THOUGH THERE ARE NO SOLDIERS, I AM HERE! WHAT WILL YOU DO, HIDEYOSHI-DONO?!
HOW-EVER!
YOU SAID YOU WANT TO LIVE LIKE AN INFANT, WITHOUT SHACKLES AND WITHOUT FEAR. I WONDER WHAT CHAINS YOU NOW AND WHAT YOU'RE AFRAID OF.
NOW! WHAT WILL YOU DO?
THE RAVINE WILL PREVENT IT FROM REACHING THE SUMMIT, BUT THE FIRE WILL BE SEEN EASILY. AND THAT WILL SPOIL YOUR PLAN.

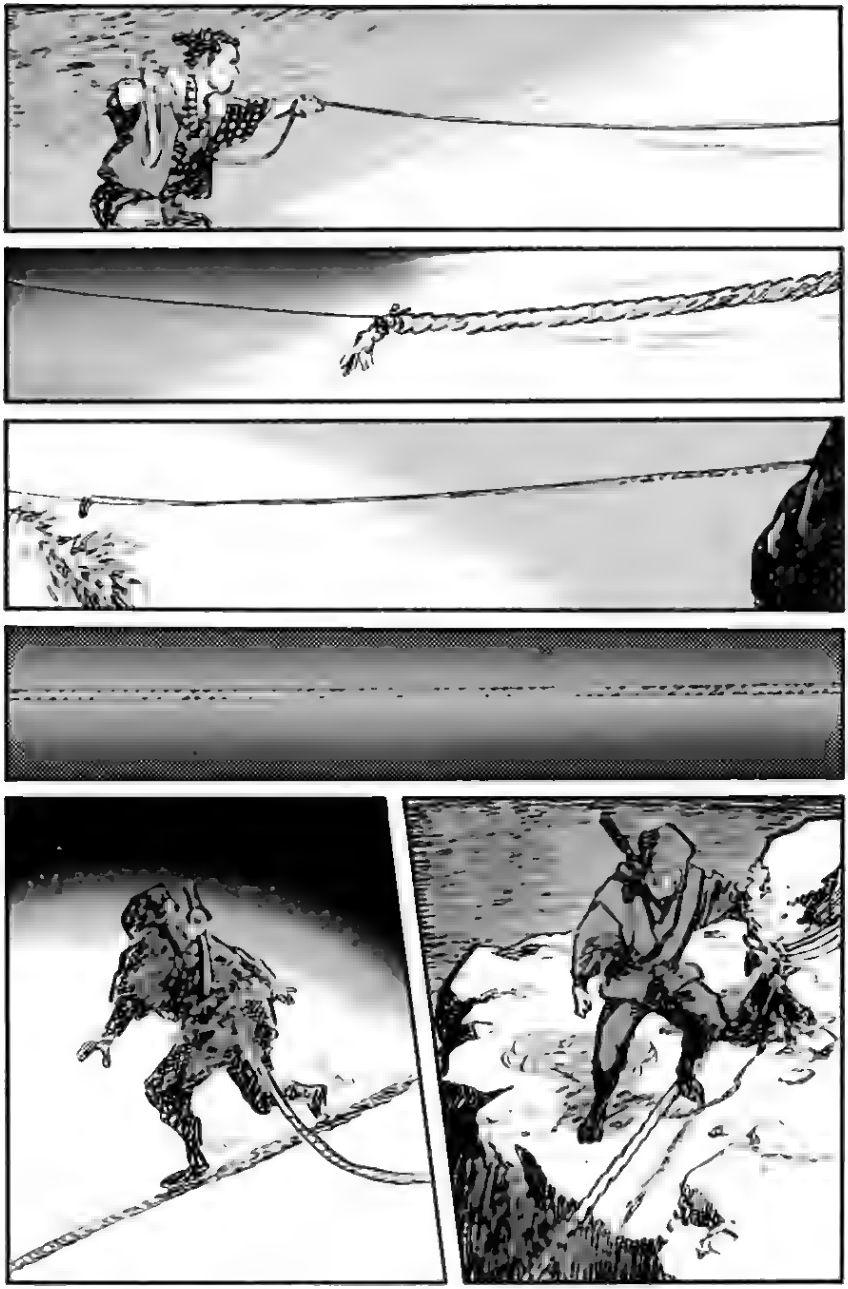
ARE YOU TRAPPED BY THE THOUGHT OF LOSING MINŌ?! ARE YOU TERRIFIED OF LETTING THE SAITŌ CLAN DISAPPEAR?!

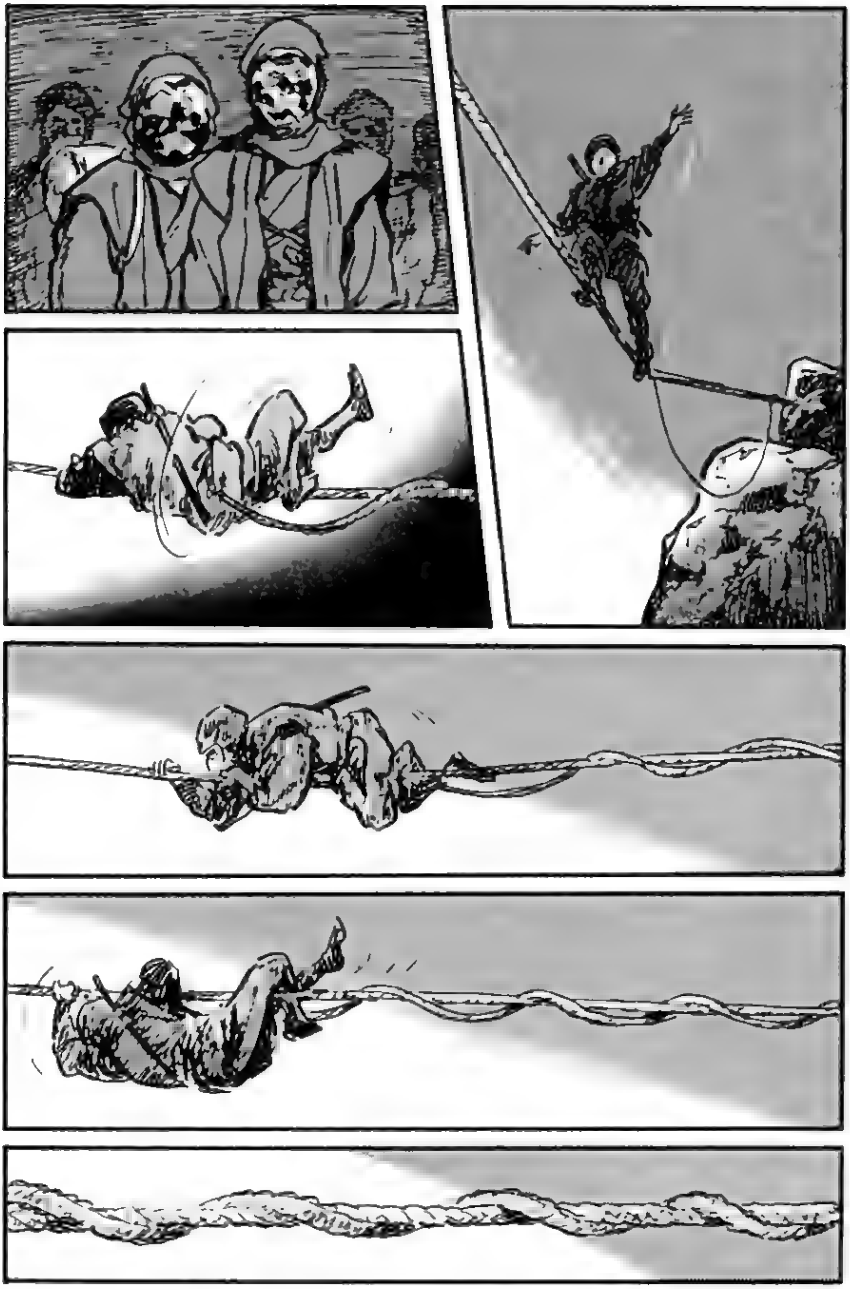
IF TAKENAKA WAS STILL UP THERE
I I FEEL WEAK AT THE KNEES! WHAT A SCARY MAN HE IS!
AL-READY!
WE'D BE AT THE BOTTOM OF THE RAVINE

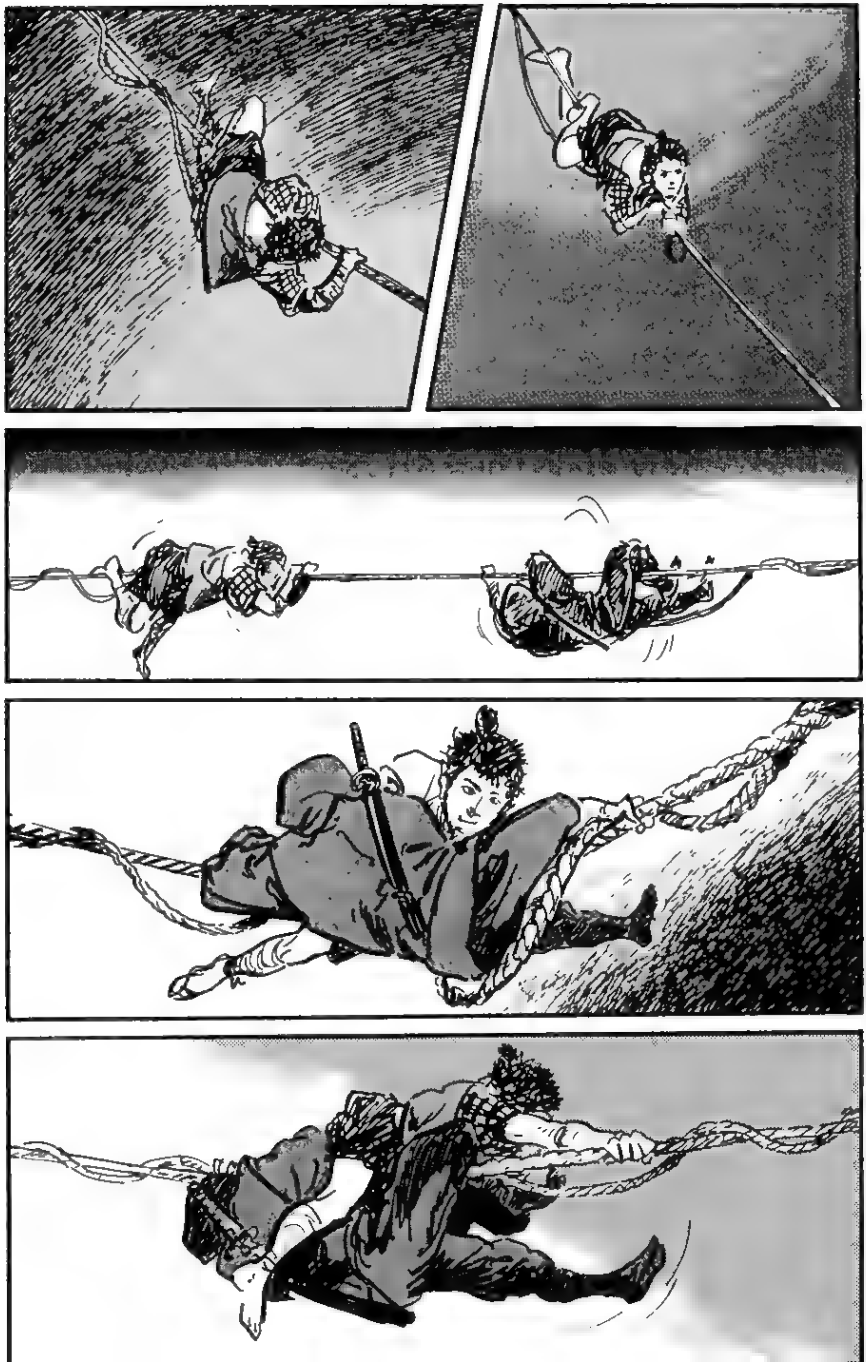


TA

HIS AGILITY IS FEARSOME!
HE IS FŪMA INDEED.
HE DID IT!



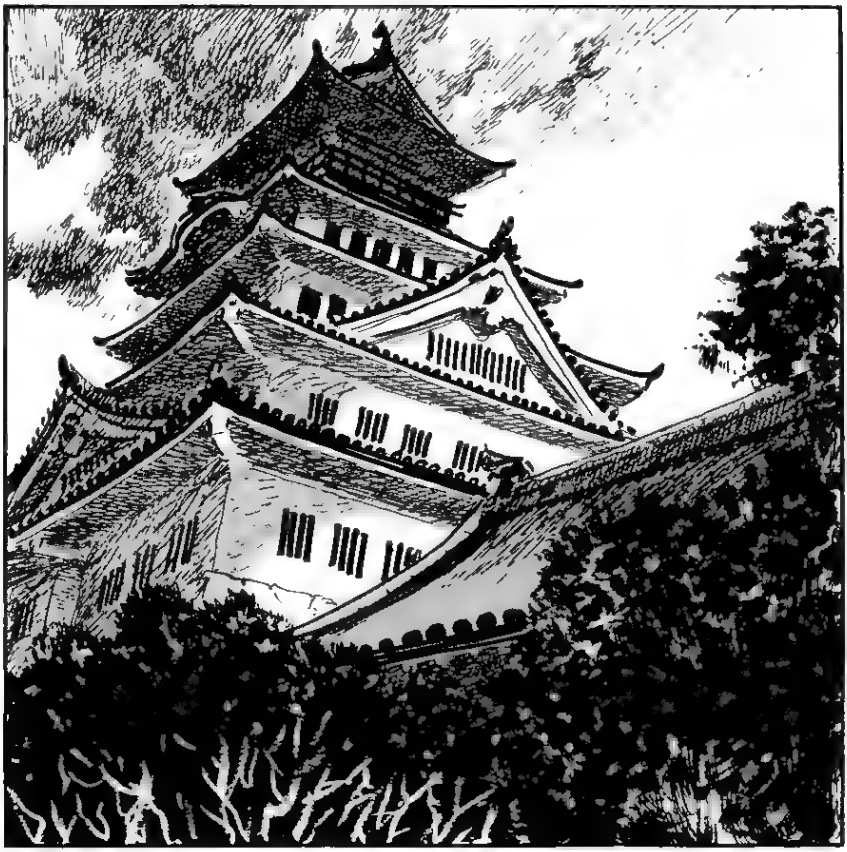




WE ARE ALL SUPPA, BUT STILL, THEY ARE SPECIAL. THEY ARE DEFINITELY THE SON OF FŪMA AND THE BEST OF IGA.
INCREDIBLE!
WAIT TILL THE MOON IS BEHIND THE CLOUDS.
NOT YET!
ALL RIGHT. LET'S GET GOING.

YOU CAN SEE THE BOTTOM OF THE RAVINE IF IT'S LIGHT. CAN'T WHEN IT'S DARK. EASIER TO GO ACROSS WHEN YOU CAN'T.
WHY? IT'S DANGEROUS WHEN IT'S DARK.
WE'LL BE MORE COMPOSED IF WE DON'T KNOW IT'S THERE! THAT MUST BE TRUE.
IF WE LOOK DOWN, WE'LL BE SCARED. HAVING THE BOTTOM IN SIGHT, OUR BODIES WILL STIFFEN.
MMG! YOU'RE RIGHT.
I'LL THINK ABOUT IT.
SO, MOSUKE. WHY DON'T YOU WORK FOR ME?
MOSUKE OF IHORO.
WHAT'S YOUR NAME?
ONE SLIP AND YOU WON'T BE ABLE TO!
HUH?! ANSWER ME RIGHT NOW!

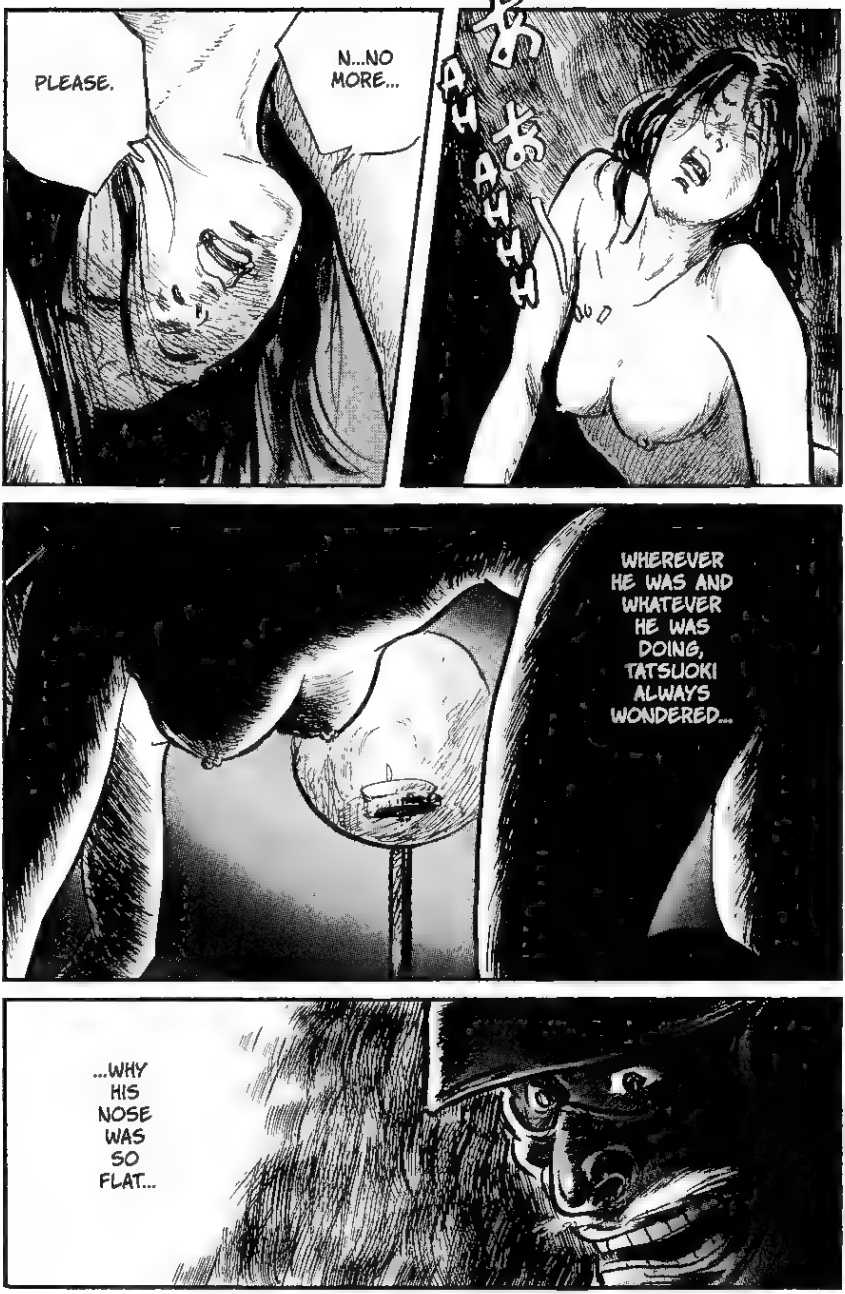
HA HA HA HA HA HA.
FINE, I'LL WORK FOR YOU.
HA HA HA HA HA HA.
I MIGHT!
WHO'D FALL?!
THIS WAS HORIO MOSUKE YOSHIHARU, WHO EVENTUALLY BECAME ONE OF HIDEYOSHI'S TOP GENERALS AND WAS ULTIMATELY RANKED AMONG THE SEVEN SPEARS OF SHIZUGATAKE.



AHHHH
AHHHHHH

I'LL CHOP OFF HIS NOSE, CUT OFF HIS EARS, AND GOUGE OUT HIS EYES BEFORE I HANG HIM FROM THE DONJON OF THIS CASTLE!
NOBU-NAGA! THAT BASTARD!
CHNNG
GASHA
GASHA
GASHA

SAITŌ TATSUOKI, THE LORD OF MINŌ, WAS ONLY NINETEEN YEARS OLD AT THE TIME.
GASHA
GASHA
GASHA


PLEASE.
N...NO MORE...
AHHHHH
WHEREVER HE WAS AND WHATEVER HE WAS DOING, TATSUOKI ALWAYS WONDERED...
...WHY HIS NOSE WAS SO FLAT...

TATSUOKI COULDN'T HELP THINKING THAT HAD SOMETHING TO DO WITH IT.
HIS FATHER, YOSHITATSU, WENT TO WAR AGAINST DŌSAN, HIS GRANDFATHER, AND BEHEADED HIM AND SLICED OFF HIS NOSE.
SHUT UP!!

THIS DEPRESSED TATSUOKI EVERY TIME HE THOUGHT OF IT, SO HE BURIED HIMSELF IN SEX TO GET THE IDEA OUT OF HIS MIND.

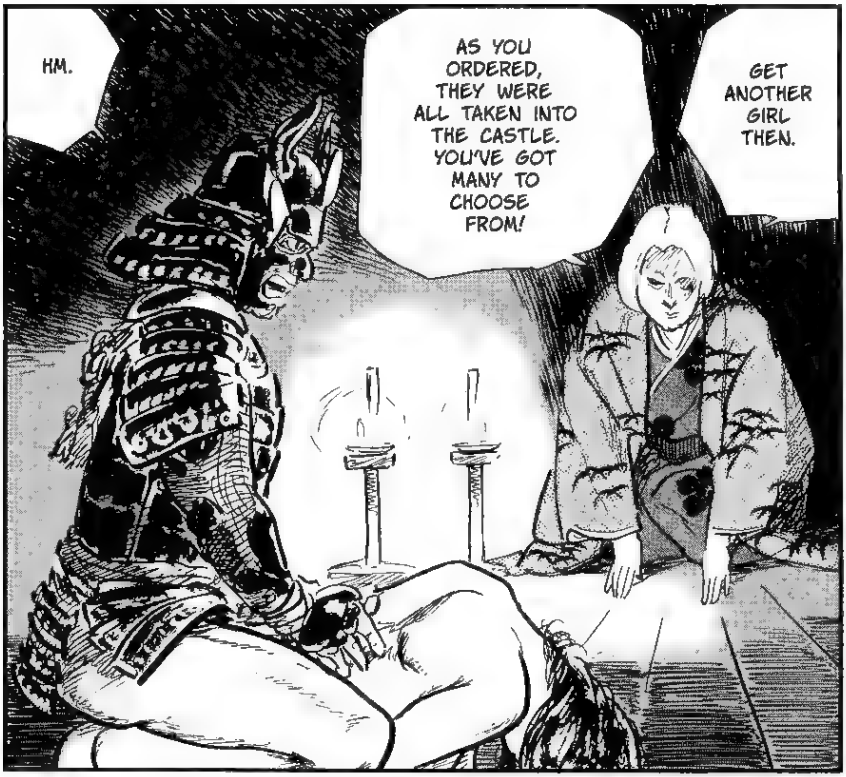
WHY AREN'T YOU WEARING YOUR CHEEK MASK?! LOOK, I HAD IT CUSTOM-MADE ESPECIALLY FOR YOU!

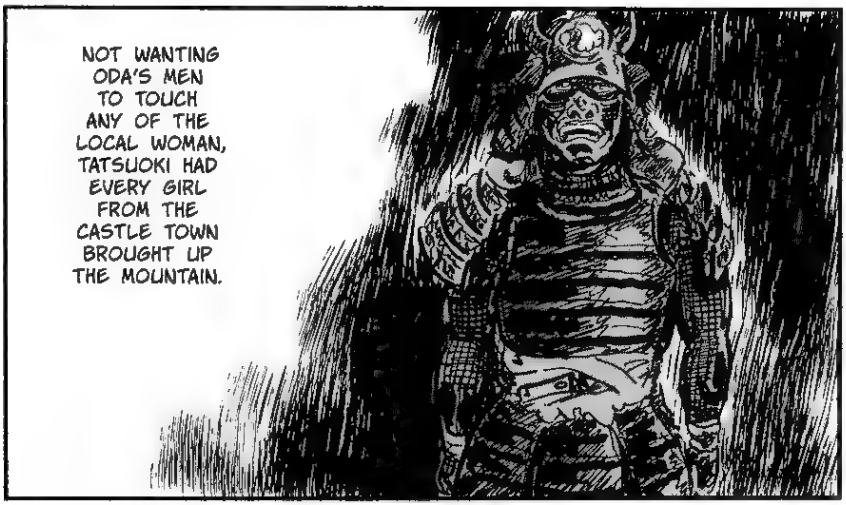
PUT IT ON, I SAID!
HMPH!

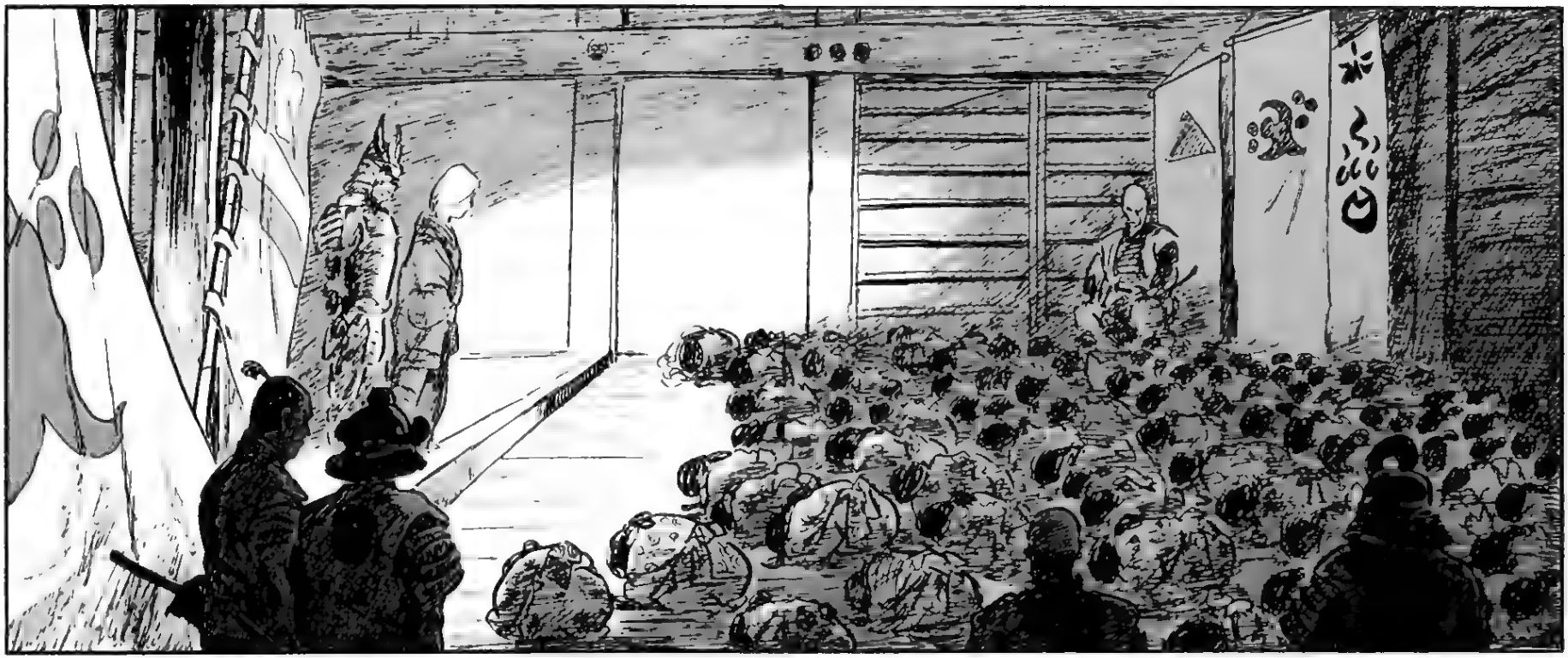
EVEN AS A CHILD, TATSUOKI KNEW HIS SQUAT FACE REMINDED HIS FATHER OF HOW HE'D CHOPPED OFF GRANDFATHER'S NOSE.
THUS, TATSUOKI GREW UP WEARING A CHEEK MASK. HE CURSED HIS NOSE AND HAD TO PIN WOMEN DOWN BENEATH HIMSELF JUST TO KEEP HIS CALM, RATHER THAN MINDING THE WAR OR RULING HIS TERRITORY.

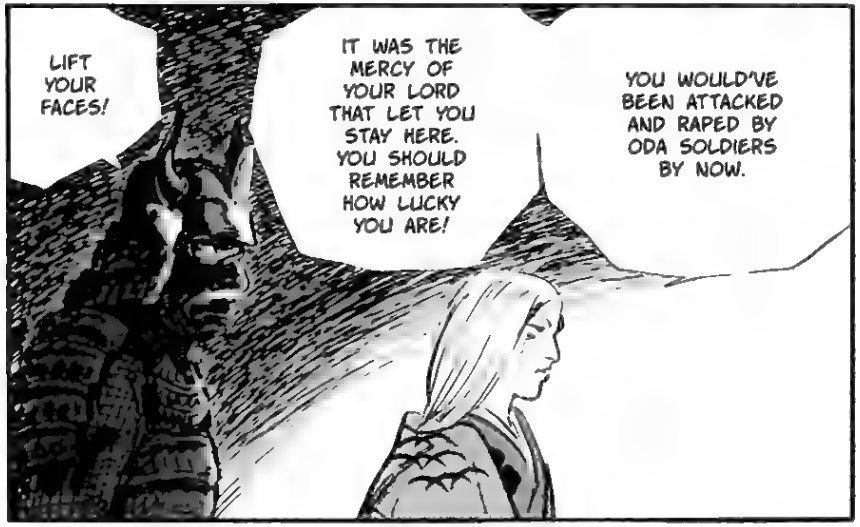
SZZZZ
ARRGH! I'M LIMP!
IT'S DARK!
AHHH! SOMEONE!!
THE LIGHT! GET THE LIGHT!
STMP
STMP
STMP

I WENT SOFT, MOTHER.


HM.
AS YOU ORDERED, THEY WERE ALL TAKEN INTO THE CASTLE. YOU'VE GOT MANY TO CHOOSE FROM!
GET ANOTHER GIRL THEN.


NOT WANTING ODA'S MEN TO TOUCH ANY OF THE LOCAL WOMAN, TATSUOKI HAD EVERY GIRL FROM THE CASTLE TOWN BROUGHT UP THE MOUNTAIN.




LIFT YOUR FACES!
IT WAS THE MERCY OF YOUR LORD THAT LET YOU STAY HERE. YOU SHOULD REMEMBER HOW LUCKY YOU ARE!
YOU WOULD'VE BEEN ATTACKED AND RAPED BY ODA SOLDIERS BY NOW.

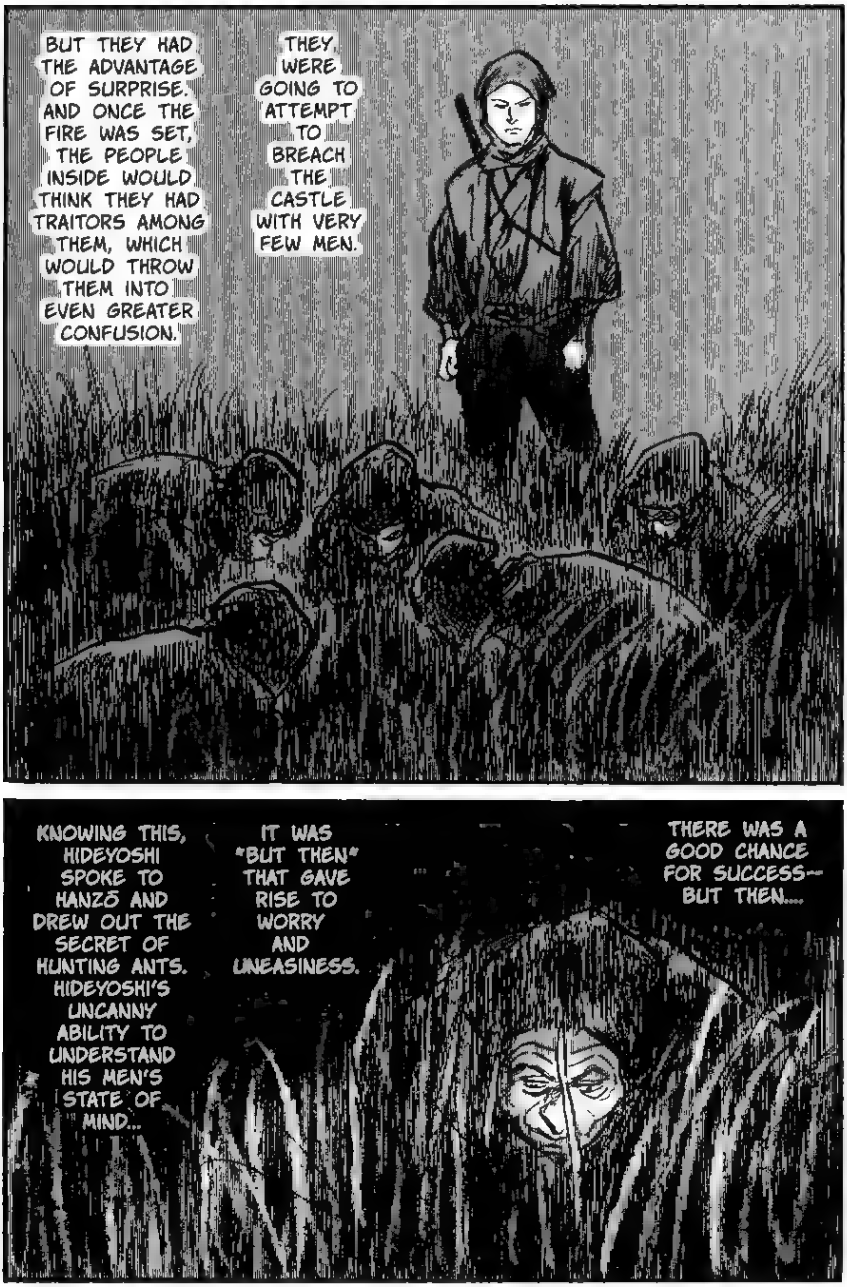
HM!
YOU'RE THE
ONE I WANT.
NICE NOSE!
IT'S PRETTY.

WANT ME TO SLICE OFF YOUR FACE?!
PLEASE... SPARE ME.
P... PLEASE...
ナムミダブツ
ギャーーーーー!!

WHILE TATSUOKI WAS HUMPING THE SECOND WOMAN FROM BEHIND THAT NIGHT...
NOW I CAN SEE TOMORROW.
HIDEYOSHI FINALLY MADE IT TO THE INOKUCHI BEHIND INABAYAMA CASTLE.

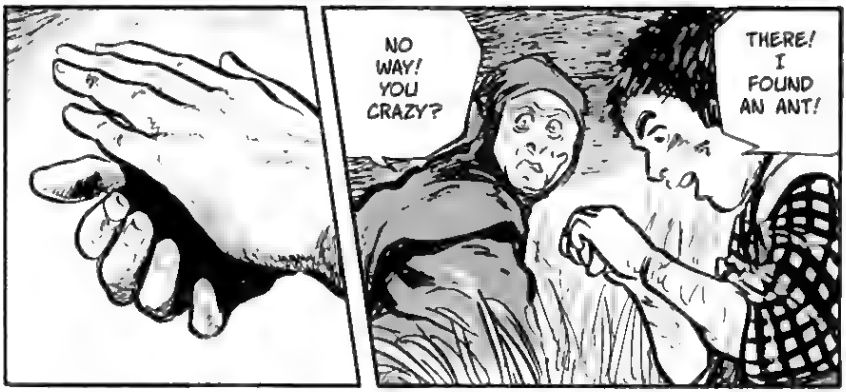
I MIGHT WET MYSELF A LITTLE.
MY THROAT IS SORE. CALL IT A SHIVER OF FRIGHT OR THE TREMOR OF A SAMURAI BRACING TO FIGHT...
EVEN A *SHINOBI* KNOWN AS THE BEST OF IGA MUST GET NERVOUS ONCE IN A WHILE.
HANZŌ-*SA*, NOTHING BOTHERS YOU? NOT EVEN AT A TIME LIKE THIS?!
AN... ANT?
LOOK FOR AN ANT.
WHAT SHOULD I DO AT THE TIME LIKE THIS?
OF COURSE I DO.

BUT ISN'T IT IMPOSSIBLE TO FIND ANY AT NIGHT?
MMG... THAT'S THE SECRET!
BY THE TIME YOU FIND ONE, EVERY BUSY CONCERN SHOULD BE GONE FROM YOUR MIND.
LET GO OF ALL THOUGHT AND LOOK FOR AN ANT IN THE GRASS.
DID YOU HEAR HIS SECRET PRINCIPLE?
HUNT FOR IT WITH YOUR HEART. STARING AT THE GRASS, SEARCH FOR IT WITH YOUR MIND'S EYE.
LOOK FOR IT WITH YOUR MIND'S EYE!
NOW, LOOK FOR AN ANT!


BUT THEY HAD THE ADVANTAGE OF SURPRISE. AND ONCE THE FIRE WAS SET, THE PEOPLE INSIDE WOULD THINK THEY HAD TRAITORS AMONG THEM, WHICH WOULD THROW THEM INTO EVEN GREATER CONFUSION.
THEY WERE GOING TO ATTEMPT TO BREACH THE CASTLE WITH VERY FEW MEN.
KNOWING THIS, HIDEYOSHI SPOKE TO HANZŌ AND DREW OUT THE SECRET OF HUNTING ANTS. HIDEYOSHI'S UNCANNY ABILITY TO UNDERSTAND HIS MEN'S STATE OF MIND...
IT WAS "BUT THEN" THAT GAVE RISE TO WORRY AND UNEASINESS.
THERE WAS A GOOD CHANCE FOR SUCCESS-- BUT THEN....

SO LONG AS HIDEYOSHI WAS THERE, HIS MASTER, IEYASU, AND NOBUNAGA WOULD NEVER BECOME ENEMIES
ALSO BROUGHT HANZŌ A CERTAIN SENSE OF COMPOSURE

HANZŌ FELT SO WHOLE-HEARTEDLY
IT WAS GOOD I CAME


NO WAY! YOU CRAZY?
THERE! I FOUND AN ANT!

OH! WOW!
HMM.
HA HA HA HA HA.
I CAN SEE EVEN AT NIGHT!

MAKE SURE WE DON'T FIGHT AMONG OURSELVES!
OUR PASSWORD IS ANT!
YES SIR!
AH, IT'S OVER.

GLOSSARY

Andō Iganokami
(AKA Ando Morinari) Ando Morinari was a very notable retainer under the Oda clan. Formerly of the Saito clan, and one of the famed "Mino Three."

dharani
A dharani is a type of ritual speech similar to a mantra.

Fūma
A ninja clan that served under Hōjō Ujimasa.

Hachisuka Koroku
(1526–1586) Also known as Hachisuka Masakatsu, a subordinate to Toyotomi Hideyoshi. He was born at the region of Mino. During the construction of the castle at Sunomata, Koroku assisted Hideyoshi, later leading him to become an adviser under Hideyoshi.

hajakenshō
A term originally created by Jicang (549–623), a Chinese Buddhist master of Mādhyamika (AKA Sanlun). The term has been translated to: reject evil and establish truth; refute evil and manifest the true law; refute evil and reveal the truth; destroy evil and spread righteousness; denounce heresy and manifest the truth; obliterate evil and proliferate righteousness.

honorifics
Japan is a class and status society, and proper forms of address are critical. Common markers of respect are the prefixes *o* and *go*, and a wide range of suffixes. Some of the suffixes you will encounter in *Path of the Assassin*:

dono – archaic; used for higher-ranked or highly respected figures
san – the most common, used among equals or near equals
sama – used for superiors
sensei – used for teachers, masters, respected entertainers, and politicians.

Horio Mosuke Yoshiharu
(1542–July 26, 1611) A *daimyo* in Azuchi-Momoyama period and Edo period. He was appointed to one of three *chu-ro* by Toyotomi Hideyoshi and the first leader of the Matsue clan.

ichigo ichie
An important concept in *chado*, the art of ceremonial tea-making. Literally, the term translates to "one encounter, one chance." The philosophy behind it is that one should always do one's best when making tea for another, treasuring each encounter as a once-in-a-lifetime event, as if today were the last time you might meet.

Igamono
"Men of Iga."

Inaba Iyonokami
(AKA Inaba Ittetsu) Also known as Inaba Yoshimichi. An officer under the Saito clan, and one of the famed "Mino Three." Later defected to the Oda clan.

Inabayama
Inaba + *yama* (mountain) It is the "mountain castle of Inaba," and still stands today, though much repaired.

inokuchi
Literally translates to "the mouth of the well."

Izumo province
An old province of Japan which today consists of the eastern part of Shimane prefecture in the Chugoku region. The origin of the word Izumo is from the name of the goddess Izanami. She is the mother of Japan and is buried on Mt. Hiba, at the border of the old provinces of Izumo and Hoki, near modern-day Yasugi of Shimane prefecture. It was one of the regions of ancient Japan where major political powers arose.

Kaitō-gun
An old district of Aichi prefecture.

Kamakura
A city southeast of current-day Honshu, Japan, on an arm of the Pacific Ocean south of Yokohama. Probably founded in the seventh century.

Komaki castle
Komaki followed Nagoya castle and Kiyosu castle becoming Oda Nobunaga's third castle. After Nobunaga secured Mikawa province (eastern Aichi prefecture) by an alliance with Tokugawa Ieyasu, he set his sights on invading the Mino province (Gifu prefecture). To that end he built Komaki castle in 1563.

kunai
A kunai is an ancient kind of trowel, originated during the Tensho era in Japan. Contrary to popular belief, they were not designed as throwing weapons, though they can definitely be thrown and cause damage. *Ninjutsu* is very versatile in the way it employs weapons and non-weapons. A ninja could work as a gardener during the day and use a kunai without raising suspicion.

Kunoichi
Female ninja.

Ma
Demon

measurement—length
1 *ken* is approximately 1.181 meters – 71.57 inches
1 *li* is about 3.927 kilometers.

measurement—weight
1 *kan* = 8.27 lb,
1 *monme* = 0.13 oz.

Mino
Mino is an old province of Japan, which today composes nearly the southern part of Gifu prefecture

nobuseri
A wandering samurai—a soldier of fortune. In the case of this volume of *Path of the Assassin*, likely referring to specialized warriors.

-saa
An informal expression of the honorific *sama*.

Saito Dosan
(1494–1556) The epitome of the *daimyo* that dramatically rose and also fell from power in Sengoku period Japan. He is known as Mamushi of Mino (a type of poisonous snake) for his ruthless tactics

Saitō Tatsuoki
(1548–August 14, 1573) A *daimyo* in Mino province during the Sengoku period. He was a son of Saitō Yoshitatsu. Tatsuoki succeeded his father at the age of fourteen. He was, however, an incapable ruler unlike his grandfather and father.

Saitō Yoshitatsu
(1527-1561) One of the sons of Saitō Dosan, who is known as the serpent *daimyo*. Yoshitatsu was a feudal lord of Mino

sake
Rice wine.

Sawa Jirōzaemon
Also a retainer of Saitō clan, who later surrendered to Kinoshita Tōkichirō (AKA Toyotomi Hideyoshi).

sennari byōtan
Translates to "thousand gourds." The symbol of Osaka prefecture, called the sennari byōtan, was designed based on the crest of Toyotomi Hideyoshi, who became the feudal lord of Osaka castle.

Seven Spears of Shizugatake
The top generals of Toyotomi Hideyoshi, who sought to control Japan at the end of the sixteenth century. They were all members of Hideyoshi's elite mounted bodyguard at the battle of Shizugatake in 1583.

shinobi
Ninja.

Sūfu Sessai, Taigen
(d. 1557) Also known as Taigen Sessai, a Japanese abbot and mountain ascetic. He was the uncle of Imagawa Yoshimoto, and served him as military advisor and as commander of Imagawa's forces, despite his lack of any formal battle training or experience.

Takenaka Hanbei Shigeharu
Served the Saito clan of Mino, but later plotted an uprising and took over the Saitō castle at Inabayama Toyotomi Hideyoshi was so incredibly impressed by this tactic, he invited Hanbei to join his forces as a strategist.

Three Poisons
Greed, hatred, and ignorance.

Three Realms
Karmadhatu (realms of sensuous pleasure), *rupadhatu* (realm of form), and *arupadhatu* (realm of formlessness).

Tokugawa
Toku (virtue/merit/grace/good) + *gawa* (kawa =river).

Ujiie Hitachinosuke
(AKA Ujiie Naomoto (d. 1571), better known as "Ujiie Bokuzen," used to be one of three chief retainers under the Saitō clan that later defected to the Oda clan.

Yamabuseri
Yamabushi. A soldier (samurai or ninja) specializing in mountain maneuvers and combat

Zhuge Liang
(AKA Kongming) Celebrated adviser to Liu Bei, founder of the Shu-*han* dynasty of the Six Dynasties period. Liu was so impressed with Zhuge that on his deathbed he urged Zhuge to take the throne himself if his own son proved incapable A genius in mechanics and mathematics, Zhuge is credited with inventing a bow for shooting several arrows at once and with perfecting the "eight dispositions," a series of military tactics.

KAZUO KOIKE

Though widely respected as a powerful writer of graphic fiction, Kazuo Koike has spent a lifetime reaching beyond the bounds of the comics medium. Aside from co-creating and writing such classic manga as *Lone Wolf and Cub* and *Crying Freeman,* Koike has hosted the popular *Shibi Golf Weekly* instructional television program; founded the *Albatross View* golf magazine; produced movies; written popular fiction, poetry, and screenplays; and mentored some of Japan's best manga talent.

Koike started the *Gekiga Sonjuku,* a college course aimed at helping talented writers and artists—such as *Ranma 1/2* creator Rumiko Takahashi—break into the comics field. His methods and teachings continue to influence new generations of manga creators, not to mention artists and writers around the world. Examples of Koike's influence range from the comics works of Frank Miller and Stan Sakai to the films of Quentin Tarantino.

The driving focus of Koike's narrative is character development, and his commitment to the character is clear: "Comics are carried by characters. If a character is well-created, the comic becomes a hit." Kazuo Koike's continued success in comics and literature has proven this philosophy true.

Kazuo Koike continues to work in the entertainment media to this very day, consistently diversifying his work and forging new paths across the rough roads of Edo-period history and the green swaths of today's golfing world.

GOSEKI KOJIMA

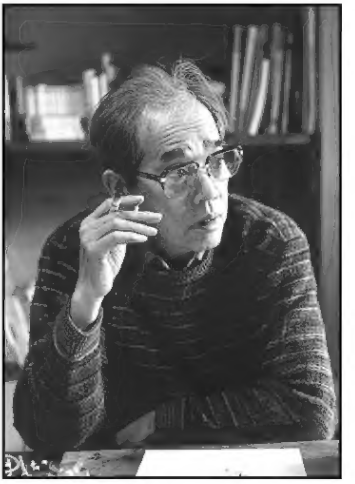
Goseki Kojima was born on November 3, 1928, the very same day as the godfather of Japanese comics, Osamu Tezuka. Art was a Kojima family tradition, his own father an amateur portrait artist and his great-great-grandfather a sculptor.

In 1950, Kojima moved to Tokyo, where the postwar devastation had given rise to special manga forms for audiences too poor to buy the new manga magazines just starting to reach the newsstands. Kojima created art for *kami-shibai*, or "paper-play" narrators, who would use manga story sheets to present narrated street plays, and later moved on to creating works for the *kashi-bon* market, bookstores that rented out books, magazines, and manga to mostly low-income readers.

In 1967, Kojima broke into the magazine market with his ninja adventure, *Dojinki*. As the manga magazine market grew and diversified, he turned out a steady stream of popular samurai manga series.

In 1970, in collaboration with Kazuo Koike, Kojima began the work that would seal his reputation, *Kozure Okami* (*Lone Wolf and Cub*). Many additional series would follow, including *Path of the Assassin* and *Samurai Executioner*.

In his final years, Kojima turned to creating original graphic novels based on the movies of his favorite director, the great Akira Kurosawa. Kojima passed away on January 5, 2000 at the age of seventy-one.



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